

## Amazing Encounters

Lesson for April 2, 2023

**Unit II:** Experiencing the Resurrection

**Scriptural Background:** Luke 24: 1-12

**Printed Text:** Luke 24: 1-12

**Key verse:** “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!*”  
(Luke 24: 5b-6a, NIV)

As Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

Gary Thomas, *Christian Times*

### Key Terms

1. **Behold** (verse 4) – Look; see. Behold' is used 1,298 times in the King James version of the Bible. It is derived from the Greek word '*eido*,' which has the literal translation of: be sure to see.
2. **Found** (verse 3) – Learned; discovered. To lay the basis of anything; to set, or place, as on something solid for support.
3. **Perplexed** (verse 4) – In the Greek New Testament, there is a word that is usually translated, "perplexed," or, "perplexity." It literally means, "at a loss for a way." This word is describing a condition where we are IN a situation but cannot see any way out.
4. **Seek** (verse 5) – The word “seek” in Hebrew in Strong's Concordance means “to search out by any method.” In Greek, it means to “seek to find.” Although Strong's gives more meanings and elaboration, the core meaning of the word “seek” supports God's desire to be found. To seek something is to crave after it.
5. **Stone** (verse 2) – A rock of indeterminate size or shape.
6. **Tomb** (verse 1) – A burial vault or grave. A pit in which the dead body of a human being is deposited.

## Lesson Background

In Luke 24:1-12 we have the account of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ through the eye-witness account of the women at the tomb. The emphasis of this passage in Luke's Gospel is the testimony of this group of women who first found out that Jesus had risen from the dead.

It is interesting to note that it was a group of women who first came to the tomb because they were not afraid to venture out after the crucifixion. The apostles may have found cause to hide, thinking that they may be next; for they had the pain of Jesus' crucifixion burned into their minds.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Where's His Body? (Luke 24:1-4)

**Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning:** Jesus was crucified on Friday. After His entombment, the tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:62-66). The tomb stayed sealed and guarded until discovered by these women on the first day of the week, very early in the morning.

A rich man like Joseph of Arimathea would likely have a tomb carved into solid rock; this tomb was in a garden near the place of crucifixion (John 19:41). The tomb would have a small entrance and perhaps one or more compartments where bodies were laid out after being wrapped with linen strips smeared with spices, aloes, and ointments. Customarily, the Jews left these bodies alone for a few years until they decayed down to the bones, then the bones were placed in a small stone box known as an ossuary. The ossuary remained in the tomb with the remains of other family members.

The entrance to the tomb was blocked by a heavy circular shaped stone, securely rolled in a channel, so only several strong men could move it. This was done to ensure that no one would disturb the remains. John 19:42 specifically tells us that the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea that Jesus was laid in was close to the place of Jesus' crucifixion. It reminds us that in God's plan, the cross and the power of the resurrection are always permanently and closely connected.

“This became the day of Christian worship (Acts 20:7). The change from the traditional and biblical Sabbath is in itself strong evidence of the Resurrection because it shows the strength of the disciples' conviction about what happened on that day.” (Liefeld)

**They, and certain other women with them:** These women are of special note. **They** refers to the women from Galilee who saw Jesus put in the tomb (Luke 23:55-56). Luke agrees with Mark 15:47 and Matthew 27:61 that **they** included *Mary Magdalene* and *Mary the mother of James* (Luke 24:10). The **certain other women with them** included *Joanna*, (Luke 24:10) and others, unnamed (*and the other women with them*, Luke 24:10).

**Came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared:** The body of Jesus was hastily prepared for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-41). The women came to properly complete the hurried job performed immediately after Jesus' death.

Mark 16:3 tells us that the women discussed the problem of what to do with the heavy stone blocking the entrance to the tomb.

**But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus:** The actual *event* of Jesus' resurrection is nowhere described, but the discovery of it is recorded in some detail. Here, the women who intended to give Jesus' body a more proper burial discover that the stone was rolled away from the tomb, and that the body of Jesus was not inside the tomb.

Matthew 27:65-66 reminds us that there was a guard set round the tomb. The stone could not have been rolled away by the women (they were not strong enough) or by the disciples (even if they were brave enough, they could not overcome the armed guards). No one else would have wanted to roll away the stone, and Matthew 28:2 tells us that it was an angel who rolled it away. **The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out.** John 20:19 tells us that Jesus, in His resurrection body, could pass through material barriers. **The stone was rolled away so that others could see in** and be persuaded that Jesus Christ was and is risen from the dead.

**As they were greatly perplexed about this:** Once the women saw the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, their immediate reaction was that they were **greatly perplexed**. They did not expect to find an empty tomb. This shows that the resurrection accounts cannot be the product of wishful thinking; they were not even *expecting* that it could happen.

**Two men stood by them in shining garments:** Even as angels announced the birth of Jesus, (Luke 2:8-15) so they also announced the resurrection of Jesus. The announcement of His birth was made to a few humble people, considered unimportant by the culture; His resurrection announced by angels to a few women.

## II. Remember What He Told You? (Luke 24: 5-8)

**Why do you seek the living among the dead?** This was a wonderfully logical question. The angels seemed almost surprised that the women were surprised; after all, the angels had heard what Jesus said regarding His resurrection, and they knew the women had heard it also. They naturally wondered why the women were surprised.

“Jesus is not to be thought of as dead: therefore, he is not to be sought among the dead.” (Morris)

“As places of burial were unclean, it was not reasonable to suppose that the *living* should frequent them; or that if any was missing, he was likely to be found in such places.” (Clarke)

The angels' question made a point: the **living** are not to be found among the **dead**. We should not expect spiritual life among those who do not have it. Many look for Jesus in dead things – religious traditionalism, formalism, man's rules, human effort, and ingenuity. We find Jesus only where there is resurrection life, where He is worshipped in Spirit and in truth.

**He is not here:** These were some of the most beautiful and important words ever spoken by an angel to men. One may look all over Jerusalem and see countless thousands of tombs, but one will never find the tomb of Jesus – because **He is not here**.

Every so often someone claims to have found evidence of the tomb of Jesus or the bones of Jesus. Each claim is found to be untrue, while the testimony of the angels is proved true over and over again: **He is not here**.

Even the beginning of the resurrection account refutes many of the false alternative theories suggested by some. Here are a few:

- The wrong tomb theory is answered by Luke 23:55; the women knew exactly which tomb Jesus was buried in.
- The wishful thinking theory is answered by Luke 24:4 and 24:11, which note the surprise of the women and the disciples of the news of Jesus' resurrection.
- The animals-ate-the-body theory is answered by the presence of the stone (Luke 24:2).
- The "swoon/blackout" theory is answered by the presence of the stone (Luke 24:2).
- The grave robber theory is answered by the presence of the Roman guard and seal (Matthew 27:62-66).

**The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again:** To the women, it must have seemed like a long time ago that Jesus said these words (Luke 18:31-33). Nevertheless, they needed to remember them, and the angels reminded them of what Jesus said.

**Must** is the critical word here; just as much as the crucifixion of Jesus was necessary and ordained, so was His resurrection. Jesus would have never come to the place of Calvary unless there was also an empty tomb of resurrection there.

**And they remembered His words:** The first notes of hope were sounded in the hearts of the women when they **remembered** Jesus' words. The empty tomb, the presence of angels, the words of the angels in and of themselves could not change their hearts – but **His words** could change and cheer their hearts.

### III. We Don't Believe You (Luke 24:9-12)

**Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest:** The women who saw the evidence of the resurrected Jesus and remembered His words were excited about what seemed to be the most wonderful news possible – that Jesus *was* alive and had triumphed over death.

They would not be excited if Jesus had only somehow miraculously survived the ordeal of the cross. The news that He was alive meant so much more to them than knowing Jesus was a *survivor*; it meant He was the conqueror over death and that He was everything they had hoped for and more.

**It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them:** These were the women mentioned in Luke 24:1 as those who discovered the empty tomb. Three are mentioned specifically, and then an unnamed group of **other women**. These were given the privilege of being the first to tell others of the risen Jesus.

The only references to **Mary Magdalene** in the Gospels concern her as a witness of the crucifixion (Mark 15:40 and John 19:25) and of the resurrection (all four gospels) and as one from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2, Mark 16:9).

**Joanna** is mentioned in Luke 8:2 as one of the women who accompanied Jesus and provided for His needs. She is also noted in Luke 8:3 as the wife of Chuza, who helped manage Herod's affairs (a steward). She was likely a woman of privilege and resources. It is interesting to note that Chuza (Joanna's husband) worked for the murderer of John The Baptist and she used her/their resources to support Jesus!

**Mary the mother of James** is only mentioned in connection with the resurrection appearances of Jesus. She was apparently the mother of one of the apostles, James the Less (not James the brother of John).

And **the mother of Zebedee's children**. That is, of James and John (Matthew 10:2). Her name was **Salome** (Mark 15:40).

These women had been faithful. They were the last at the cross and first at the tomb. And now, the first to tell Jesus had risen.

**Their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them:** Despite their excitement, the testimony of the women was not believed. In fact, to the apostles, it seemed as if the women told **idle tales**, a medical word used to describe the babbling of a fevered and insane man (according to Barclay).

“In the first century the testimony of women was not deemed authoritative. Luke's inclusion of the incident serves to emphasize his high regard for women.” (Pate)

“The disciples were not men poised on the brink of belief and needing only the shadow of an excuse before launching forth into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly skeptical.” (Morris)

**But Peter arose and ran to the tomb:** We know from John 20:3-8 that both Peter and John ran to the tomb together. They saw grave clothes, but not as if they had been ripped off after a struggle. They saw the grave clothes of Jesus lying in perfect order, as if a body had just passed out of them (John 20:6-7). When John saw that, he believed, and Peter marveled. They had not seen the risen Jesus, but they knew that something *powerful* had happened to cause a body to leave behind the grave clothes in such a manner.

**Marveling to himself at what had happened:** Peter and John both observed what was in the tomb and John believed (John 20:8). This tells us that Peter analyzed the situation; he knew something spectacular had happened because of the condition of the grave clothes, but also because he had forgotten the words of Jesus (John 20:9), he did not yet understand and *believe* the way John had.

You can know that Jesus rose from the dead, but unless you know His words, it won't make sense. Without knowing the life and teachings of Jesus:

- You don't know that the resurrection means that the payment that Jesus offered on the cross was perfect and complete.
- You don't know that the cross was the payment and the empty tomb is the receipt.
- You don't know that death has no hold on redeemed man.
- You don't know that when God's love and man's hate battled at the cross, God's love won.
- You don't know that because Jesus was raised from the dead, we can be resurrected in Him.

## Lesson Summary

This week's lesson can be easily summed up. It is the "Easter" account – simple message but a challenge for nonbelievers to grasp.

The story begins with the obvious: Jesus is dead, and his followers assume that he remains dead (24:1-3). The women come to the tomb because that is where they saw the body of Jesus was placed after his crucifixion (23:55-56). They bring the spices along to anoint the body of Jesus, to show proper respect for the dead. The discovery of the empty tomb does not lead to an easy change of perspective. It brings confusion, not clarity. Bodies that are dead presumably remain dead. The best one can do is to treat them with respect.

Many modern readers of the gospel might be content to do the same. We, too, assume that death is death, and that our proper response should be to enshrine the dead Jesus in the tomb of memory. We might recall that he was an insightful teacher, a fiery prophet, and a compassionate healer. But he died. So we imagine ourselves called to hallow his memory with praise for his legacy, much as the women imagined themselves called to honor his dead body with spices and ointments. One would think that would be enough.

The women receive a word that runs counter to what they know to be true. "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (24:5). One might be tempted to linger over the description of these angelic messengers, but they are not the point. The focus in this section is on the message, not the messengers (24:4-7). What is most striking is that the women encounter the resurrection through this message. They are told that Jesus has risen, but they do not see the risen Jesus himself. What they have is a word, a message.

This brings the Easter experience uncomfortably close, because this is precisely what we have—the word of resurrection. One would think God would work differently. It would seem so much easier to have the women come to the tomb and watch Jesus walk out into the light of a new day. And it would seem much easier for Jesus simply to appear in dazzling glory to us, who gather on an Easter morning generations later. And this is precisely where our situation is like that of the women on the first Easter: we are all given a message of resurrection, which flies in the face of what we know to be true.

The only logical response to such a message is unbelief. Experience teaches that death wins. The Easter message says that Jesus lives. When such contradictory claims collide, it only makes sense to continue affirming what we already know. This is what Luke reports in the next section (24:8-11). The women bring the message of resurrection to the others, and they respond as thinking people regularly respond: they thought that the message was “an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (24:11).

Unbelief does not mean that people believe nothing. Rather, it means that they believe something else. People say “I don’t believe it” because there is something else that they believe more strongly. Yet here is where the Easter message begins its work, by challenging our certainties. Experience teaches that death wins and that even the strongest succumb to it. Experience teaches that life is what you make it, so get what you can while you can because it will be over soon enough. And the Easter message says, “Really? How can you be so sure?” Death is real, but it is not final. In Jesus, life gets the last word.

The Easter message calls you from your old belief in death to a new belief in life. The claim that the tomb could not hold Jesus, and the idea that the one who died by crucifixion has now risen is so outrageous that it might make you wonder whether it might—just might—be true. The apostles seemed convinced that the message was nonsense, nothing more than “an idle tale” (24:11). Death was death. Yet the message was so outrageous that Peter had to go and take a look for himself (24:12). He had to wonder, “What if it is true?”

Those who gather for worship on Easter Sunday follow in the footsteps of Peter. They have heard the rumor that Jesus is alive and come to hear again for themselves: “What if it is true? What if death is real, but not final? What if Jesus is not merely past but present? What if Jesus were to meet me here? What would life be then?”

The Easter reading stops with Peter’s amazement, but the Easter story continues far beyond, as God continues to challenge the certainty of death with the promise of life. Go ahead and tell God that you think it is outrageous to expect anyone to believe that Jesus has risen. Go ahead and tell God that you believe that death gets the final word. None of this is news to God. He has heard it all before. He simply refuses to believe it. “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” God wonders. “Through the living Jesus, you are given the gift of life. Why would you think that He would offer you anything less?”