

The Empty Tomb

Devotional Reading: Psalm 22:20-31
Background Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

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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.

Key Text

They said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.

—Luke 24:5b-6a

Unit 2: Experiencing the Resurrection

Lessons 5-8

Lesson Aims

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

1. List important facts surrounding the discovery of the empty tomb.
2. Compare and contrast the women's expectation of the tomb versus its reality.
3. Identify his or her personal expectations that Jesus might upend.

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Lesson Outline

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- B. Two Strangers (vv. 4-7)
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- B. The Message Verified (vv. 11-12)

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- A. The Good News, the Best News
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Arimathaea *Air-uh-muh-thee-uh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Chuzas *Koo-za*.

Herod Antipas *Hair-ud An-tih-pus*.

Magdala *Mag-duh-luh*.

Magdalene *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

omnipotent *ahm-nih-poh-tent*.

omniscient *ahm-nish-unt*.

Sanhedrin *San-huh-drun* or *San-heed-run*.

Sadducees *Sad-you-seez*.

Pontius Pilate *Pon-shus* or *Pon-ti-us Pie-lut*.

Introduction

A. Some Good News

In the early months of 2020, people around the world were desperate to receive some good news. Shutdowns related to the coronavirus pandemic had begun, creating in some people a sense of unease and uncertainty. Further, many people were unable to see their families and friends for an extended season because of concerns about exposure to the virus. Loneliness and sadness were unavoidable.

Enter actor and filmmaker John Krasinski. While the global news cycle repeated bad news, John felt that it was the perfect time to share good news. On March 29, 2020, his web video series *Some Good News* premiered. Each episode, about 20 minutes long, was filmed in his house and was posted across various social media platforms. The episodes highlighted several positive, feel-good stories from the previous week.

By the time of this writing in late 2021, there have been over 70 million views of the nine-episode run of *Some Good News*, evidence that many people want good news. However, just because people *hear* good news does not always mean that they will *believe* that good news.

B. Lesson Context

Today's Scripture follows after the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion and death (Luke 23:26-46). Torture and execution by crucifixion was one way that the Roman Empire demonstrated the power of the state over its subjects. The brutal process of crucifixion slowly killed its victims as they bled, became dehydrated, and suffered shock and asphyxiation. That Jesus died after only several hours on the cross was a surprise (see Mark 15:44). Making a public exhibition of a prolonged and humiliating death was the primary aim of crucifixion.

The bodies of those crucified frequently remained on the crosses for several days after death as a spectacle and as a passive threat to all who would oppose the ruling powers. However, such a display did not occur for Jesus' body. Joseph, a man from the city of Arimathea and a member of the council of the Sanhedrin, received Pilate's permission to take Jesus' body (Matthew 27:57-58; Mark 15:43-45; Luke 23:50-52; John 19:38). Joseph had certain wealth, enabling him to own a rock-hewn tomb (Matthew 27:60). That Jesus was buried in this man's tomb indicated a level of love that Joseph had for Jesus; strangers were not generally buried in the tomb of another family.

Jesus' body was wrapped in burial clothes as it was entombed (Matthew 27:59; Luke 23:53; compare John 11:44). Aromatic spices were placed with the burial clothes and in the tomb to cover the stench of decay (19:40; compare 11:39). Because Jesus was buried the evening before Sabbath (Mark 15:42), additional burial spices would have to wait to be administered until after the Sabbath (Luke 23:55-56).

Joseph's tomb was like many others that were carved in rock. Chiseled niches allowed for several bodies to be buried in one tomb. A large, flat stone would seal the tomb's entrance and prevent thieves from stealing valuable artifacts or even bodies. Tombs remained sealed until all that remained of a body were its bones. Family would then enter the tomb and place the bones in a box called an ossuary.

Many first-century Jews believed in the physical resurrection of the dead, the Sadducees being a notable exception (see Acts 4:1-2; 23:8). This doctrine can be traced to Old Testament texts (Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1-2, 13). Other Jewish texts describe a physical resurrection of the righteous dead (see 2 Baruch 50-51; 2 Maccabees 7:9, 14, 23). By the time of the first century AD, the doctrine of the resurrection of the righteous dead had been accepted by several parties of Judaism, especially the Pharisees (see Acts 23:6-8).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus had prophesied regarding His death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31-33; John 2:19). However, the concept of a suffering and resurrected Savior was incomprehensible to many people, even Jesus' own disciples (Luke 9:45; 18:34).

Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; and John 20:1-29 are parallel texts to today's Scripture. Each Gospel writer included certain details found only in his specific narrative. Examples include a "great earthquake" (Matthew 28:2), a "young man ... clothed in a long white garment" (Mark 16:5), the women's silence (16:8), the women's interaction with the resurrected Jesus (Matthew 28:9-10), and Mary Magdalene's experience at the tomb (John 20:1-2). These differences do not invalidate the Gospel accounts; they highlight the different emphases that each Gospel writer wanted to stress.

I. Early-Morning Discovery

(Luke 24:1-7)

A. Empty Tomb (vv. 1-3)

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.

Those who *came unto the sepulchre* were "the women ... which came with [Jesus] from Galilee" (Luke 23:55). These women had supported Jesus during His final season of ministry. After He had died, they went to the tomb and had observed "how his body was laid" (23:55).

By necessity, the women arrived at the tomb *in the morning* on Sunday, *the first day of the week*. The Law of Moses prevented anyone from working on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; Leviticus 23:3). All work ceased by the beginning of the Sabbath at sundown on Friday. The *early morning* would have provided adequate sunlight for safe travel.

More than "Do No Harm"

My work as a hospital chaplain allows me to observe firsthand" the dedication of the hospital's employees. They prepare treatments, clean rooms, bring food, and provide comfort to patients and their families. The workload is difficult, but the staff rarely complain. These caretakers go above and beyond the health-care principle of "Do no harm." They achieve this by giving individualized care, no matter how long the patient's stay.

While death—the greatest physical harm—had come to Jesus, the women wanted to care for His body. They desired to serve Jesus, even if for the last time (in their perspective). Can you view your service to God and others as an act of worship?

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

After the body was placed in the tomb, a large *stone* was rolled in front of the tomb's entrance (Mark 15:46). Because of the concerns of the chief priests and the Pharisees that Jesus' disciples might attempt to remove Jesus' body, Pontius Pilate allowed for the tomb to be made more secure (Matthew 27:62-65). The chief priests and the Pharisees secured the tomb with a sealed stone and a guard at the tomb's entrance (27:66). The stone prevented robbers and animals from coming into the tomb. And the removal of this stone was no easy task; such stones were immense and required several strong adults to move them.

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

The Law of Moses warned that if a living person touched a dead body, then that person would be considered unclean for one week (Numbers 19:11)—potentially a major disruption to one's life. This might explain why one disciple did not enter the tomb (see John 20:5). The possibility of a state of uncleanness did not hinder the women; they *entered* the opened tomb.

Because grave robbing was a frequent occurrence, distress and uncertainty likely overtook the women when they *found not the body*. If robbers had taken His body, it would have been yet another humiliating dishonor to their *Lord Jesus*.

B. Two Strangers (vv. 4-7)

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

Seeing an empty tomb did not fit the women's expectations. They had come to the tomb to show respect and care for the body of their friend. Instead, they had become witnesses to what appeared to be a grave robbery. The women were *perplexed* and unable to explain the empty tomb.

To further the women's confusion, two figures appeared and *stood* before *them*. Although this verse describes the figures as *two men*, they are later described as "angels" (Luke 24:23; see lesson 6). Further, Matthew's Gospel tells of an angelic presence at the tomb: "the angel of the Lord" (Matthew 28:2). Despite variations in the Gospels regarding the number and identity of the individuals at the tomb, we can assume that these individuals were angelic. Elsewhere, Luke the writer describes an angelic visitor appearing as a man (Acts 10:30-31). This description has parallels in the Old Testament (example: Joshua 5:13-15). The appearance of these *men in shining garments* further confirms their heavenly identities (compare Luke 9:29-30; Acts 1:10-11).

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?

Luke's Gospel describes how people *were afraid* when seeing God's messengers (Luke 1:11-12, 26-30; 2:9-10), experiencing God's power (8:24-25, 32-35; 9:34-36), and meeting the resurrected Christ (24:37-39). The women recognized that they were in the presence of God's messengers. With a combination of fear and honor, the women *bowed*.

In Matthew's account of this event, the women were told to "fear not" (Matthew 28:5; compare Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10). Luke's account, however, does not include this statement of comfort. Instead, the women are asked a question that amounts to the

following: “Why do you seek the *living* Savior from among the dead?” The women understandably had sought Jesus’ body in the tomb. But the angels provided a corrective to the women: Jesus was no longer dead but was alive in both body and spirit; He walked with the living (see Revelation 1:18)!

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

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The underlying Greek verb behind *risen* is in passive voice. One might assume that this fact means that Jesus was raised from the dead through a power beyond His own. The totality of Scripture, however, provides a more nuanced perspective: Jesus’ resurrection resulted from the power of the entire triune Godhead. All three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—resurrected Jesus (see John 2:18-19; 10:17-18; Acts 2:24; Romans 8:11; 1 Peter 3:18).

When Jesus ministered *in Galilee*, He had taught His disciples in private regarding His upcoming death and resurrection (Luke 9:18-22; compare Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31). The women presumably received similar teachings from the disciples (see Luke 18:31-33) or from Jesus’ public statements (see 17:20-25). The fulfillment of His prophecy shows that Jesus is both omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful). At no point was He surprised or were His plans thwarted.

What Do You Think?

In what ways are believers guilty of forgetting that which has already been taught to them regarding the faith?

Digging Deeper

How will you guard against this tendency?

She Is Not Here

I had been overtaken by fear: my young daughter had gone missing. She had accompanied me and my husband to our jobs at a small college. We had left her in the college’s student center. However, as the afternoon turned to evening, she was no longer there. A quick search of the student center and the surrounding buildings revealed nothing—we had lost her!

I panicked and fearfully considered all possible outcomes. About that time, I opened the door to a small conference room and found her there, writing on a whiteboard. I can’t describe my relief as we made our way back home that evening.

Imagine the women’s fear and panic when they saw that Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb. The angels’ promise to the fearful women remains just as true to us today: He *is* risen!

—L. M. W.

Visual for Lesson 5. *Show this image as you review the discussion questions associated with Luke 24:7.*

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

For the benefit of the women, the angels repeated the main points of Jesus’ teachings regarding His suffering and resurrection. The message of the angels is not

based on any one particular teaching of Jesus. Instead, it blends several of His teachings found in Luke's Gospel (see Luke 9:22, 44; 18:32-33).

The title *Son of man* is found primarily throughout the Gospels and on the lips of Jesus. Its roots are not immediately clear, although many students believe that the title comes from the book of Daniel. There, the prophet Daniel describes a figure, "one like the Son of man" (Daniel 7:13), who was given all divine authority and power (7:14). Jesus used this title when referring to His divine authority (Luke 5:24) and power (Matthew 25:31; 26:24; Mark 13:26), but also to His humility (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58), especially regarding His suffering and death (9:22, 44; 18:31). Jesus showed His divine authority by defeating the forces of sin and death. This occurred only as He "took upon him the form of a servant" and "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:7-8; compare Mark 9:12-13; 10:45).

What Do You Think?

What is the significance for believers that Jesus was resurrected in body?

Digging Deeper

How do Luke 20:34-38; John 5:25; Romans 8:22-25; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20-28, 35-58; and 2 Corinthians 4:13-14 inform your answer in this regard?

II. Bearing Witness

(Luke 24:8-12)

A. The Message Proclaimed (vv. 8-10)

8-9. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

The women *remembered* Jesus' teaching regarding His death and resurrection (see Matthew 16:21-28; 17:22-23; Luke 9:43b-45). While they acknowledged His teaching, it remained to be known whether they understood the *why* behind what He taught.

Part of Jesus' ministry focused on the marginalized of society (see Luke 4:18-19). He showed special attention toward people with physical ailments (example: 5:12-15), people suffering from demon possession (example: Mark 1:21-28), children (example: Matthew 19:13-15), and women (example: Mark 5:21-43). Such people were promised the presence of God's blessing (see Luke 6:20-22). The revelation of the empty tomb continued the trend of showing special attention to those people marginalized by the world. Women, regarded by society as unreliable, received the blessing of being the first human witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

The women's recall of Jesus' teaching led them to action, and they *returned* to the other followers of Jesus (contrast with Mark 16:8). These women became the first to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection. Their mission field first consisted of *the eleven* remaining apostles of Jesus (see Luke 6:12-16; compare Matthew 27:1-5), then expanded to include *all the rest* of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem. This larger group of Jesus' followers likely included Cleopas and his traveling companion (see Luke 24:13-18; lesson 6) and some who would later be counted among the 120 believers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15). Through the unlikely witness of the women, the apostles were presented with the news of Jesus' resurrection.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure that you are continually remembering

Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How can you help other believers remember Scripture themselves?

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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.

Luke previously described the first *Mary* as having been delivered from seven demons (Luke 8:2). *Magdalene* indicates that she came from Magdala (Matthew 15:39), a town northwest of the Sea of Galilee. In John's Gospel, she is the first to see the resurrected Christ (see John 20:11-18; compare Mark 16:9). *Joanna* was the wife of Chuza, the steward of Herod Antipas's household (Luke 8:3). Though her husband's position in Herod's house likely afforded her certain privilege, her support of Jesus would have alienated her from the house.

Elsewhere, the second *Mary* is identified as *the mother of James* (and perhaps Joses; Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; compare 15:47). By one proposal, she was Jesus' mother (see Mark 6:3). However, Luke's identification of her by way of Jesus' half brother is unexpected (compare Acts 1:14).

These three, along with the *other women*, proclaimed the good news of the empty tomb to Jesus' followers designated as *apostles*. Luke uses the title for the disciples chosen by Jesus during His earthly ministry (Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:1-2) or for those who met the criteria in Acts 1:21-26. The title applied not only to the original Twelve (see Luke 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; Acts 2:37; 4:33) but also to certain others (see 14:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). Luke's point was to show the immediate results of their receiving the women's message. Those apostles, who would eventually be sent to proclaim the resurrected Christ, first received that message from these women!

B. The Message Verified (vv. 11-12)

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

The Law of Moses did not prohibit the testimony of a woman. However, by the first century AD, Jewish historian Josephus wrote that a woman's testimony was disallowed. Regardless of who the message came from (see John 20:24-25), the apostles doubted the validity of an empty tomb and a resurrected Jesus; such occurrences *seemed ... idle tales*. Numerous attestations regarding the resurrection would do little to persuade them (see Mark 16:11-14; compare John 20:9).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the statement that the accounts of Jesus' resurrection are only "idle tales" (Luke 24:11)?

Digging Deeper

What would be the most effective way to encourage nonbelievers to investigate the Gospels' claims in this regard?

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.

Peter (along with John; see John 20:3-10) wanted to verify the women's message. Peter is not portrayed as being lackadaisical or disinterested. Instead, he *ran to the sepulchre*, ignoring any personal indignity associated with his running. On arrival, *he*

beheld that the tomb was not empty: burial garments *laid by themselves*. A robber would not have unwrapped *the linen* burial *clothes* from the body and left them behind in the tomb.

Seeing the tomb without Jesus' body did not lead to an immediate response of faith for Peter. Instead, he *departed* from the tomb and was left *wondering* what had happened to the body of his Lord. Peter's journey of faith had come to another critical juncture. He had once expressed faith that Jesus was God's Messiah (Luke 9:18-20) but then, under pressure, had denied knowing Jesus (22:54-62). Peter now faced the challenge of the women's message. Would he believe that Jesus' teachings regarding His resurrection had come to pass?

Conclusion

A. The Good News, the Best News

For the women at the tomb, the angels brought true good news. Jesus had defeated death as He had been raised from the dead. As a result, He is now the resurrected King who rules over all creation.

Although other disciples initially doubted the women's witness, those same disciples would eventually see their resurrected Lord. As they received and believed in that good news, they were called to proclaim it to the whole world (see Matthew 28:16-20). The good news of the resurrection began with the women's witness and went out to all nations.

We believers have a role to play in proclaiming that very same good news! Followers of Jesus are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the world. Are you merely *believing* in that good news, or are you also *proclaiming* that good news to the world?

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take in the upcoming days before Easter to proclaim the good news that Jesus is alive?

Digging Deeper

How will you prepare now for possible rejection or dismissal when proclaiming this good news?

B. Prayer

God, we rejoice because we have the same good news that was first given to the women at the tomb: Jesus is risen! Show us new ways that we might share this news with others. Give us patience when the message is not received. In the name of the resurrected Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Rejoice in the good news: Jesus is risen!