

# DEATH AND LIFE

Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series C)

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The gospel lesson for The Resurrection of Our Lord comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 24, verses 1 through 12. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 24, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." <sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, <sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

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This is truly a marvelous time of year, and especially this day. Winter is over ... almost ... maybe. Your taxes are done ... probably. And Jesus Christ is risen ... indeed. There's no "almost," "maybe," or even "probably" about it. He is risen, indeed, and he lives forever as our crucified Savior and King. He is risen, indeed.

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The certainty we have about this is one of the things that makes the Christian faith unique. We are not asked to take it on blind faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Instead, he proved it by rising from the dead and appearing to eyewitnesses, of which we have the names and identities of about two dozen of them. At one point, Jesus even appeared to more than five hundred witnesses at one time.

It's fun to explore the information and details we have about the eyewitnesses. When we dig into it, we find so many marks of authenticity. They confirm for us that this is really true. And I mean on the level of historical textbook truth. We won't get too deep into it today. Instead we'll just scratch the surface and talk about the eyewitnesses named in this passage.

The first eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were the women who went to the tomb, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James, and some other women who are not named. They were the first to hear about it from the angels, and they were the first to see Jesus with their

own eyes. Luke doesn't record the first appearance of Jesus to them. He just records the angels' appearance and their proclamation the resurrection. But Matthew and John do record the physical appearance of Jesus to them (Matt. 28:9-10; John 20:11-18). It happens as they leave the tomb to go to tell the other disciples.

And, as a mark of authenticity, it's significant that the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were women, because women are always right. Actually, in the ancient world, people thought the opposite. They considered a woman's testimony to be less valuable than a man's testimony, and it had less weight in a court of law. The other disciples seemed to think this way too, because when the women reported it to them, "These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (24:11).

But this is actually a mark of authenticity, because if someone in the ancient world were making up a fictional story that they wanted people to believe, they would not choose women as the first eyewitnesses. It doesn't matter today, but in the ancient world, the only reason to tell the story this way is if it actually happened that way. That's one mark of authenticity.

The other one, concerning the women, is their names. And I don't simply mean that their names are recorded for us, but that there are just a whole bunch of Marys. Luke names three women, two of them are named Mary, and neither of them are even the most famous Mary. Again, if you're making up a fictional story, you just don't do this, unless you're going for comic effect, like if you have two brothers who are both named Darryl. It fits the historical context, because Mary was an extremely common name, but fiction writers still avoid using the same name for two different characters. So despite the confusion it causes, the gospels have a whole bunch of women named Mary. And, again, the only reason to write it this way is if that's how it really happened.

There's a lot more we could get into, but those are just a couple little nuggets. The resurrection of Jesus is not a legend. It's not a made-up story. It's not a metaphor to inspire us. It is the real event of the dead Son of God, rising from the dead. This is the kind of event that changes the universe forever.

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It's all about death and life, and specifically in that order.

From our perspective, we move from life to death, so we tend to talk about matters of life and death. Have you ever noticed that? We always put life before death. Whether we're talking about seatbelts, food for the hungry, or a war, we always talk about matters of life and death. We always put them in that order.

But God's perspective is the opposite. He moves from death to life. And he is bringing this dead world from death to life. So he talks about matters of death and life. God sees more than we do. We just see this so-called life, but God sees what is before and what is after. We think that we're living life right now. But that's not really true. We're not living life. We're living death. We think we're living life, because this so-called life is all we know. But what we consider to be life, is really death. It's the corruption of the world since the fall into sin.

God warned our first parents that when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. And they did. They didn't die in the way we usually think of death. Instead, they started living death. I imagine Adam and Eve understood this, because they had experienced real life, the way God intended. They experienced the difference, so they knew that they really did die that day (Gen. 2:17). But no one since them has really understood it, because we have not experienced the life they did. We don't know the paradise that was lost. So we think we're living life, when we're really living death.

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This might seem like a pessimistic and depressing way to view this so-called life. It's really not. If we give it a little thought, I think we will see that this is really the most hopeful way to view this life. This so-called life is what it is, whether we call it life or death or a banana. It is what it is. But if what we experience now is truly life, then the only thing that can be coming is death. But if what we experience now is actually death, then life is coming. We are living death. And the work of God is to bring life out of death. God works from death to life. His perspective is the opposite of ours.

This is a pattern that I'm starting to notice more and more in the Bible. It comes up in a number of places. It struck me in our Old Testament reading last week. In Deuteronomy 32, the LORD says, "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal" (v. 39). It's a little bit like that bad joke that parents tell sometimes when their children disappoint them: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it." But it's the complete opposite. Instead of moving from life to death, God is moving from death to life.

And this should help us, at least a little bit, to understand the wrath of God and the discipline of God. God has wrath. And God kills. But he does not kill because he wants death. His good and gracious will for us is not that we would die, but live. So God kills in order to bring life out of death. And he does not kill that which is truly alive. He kills that which is living in death, so that he can bring it into true life.

We see this in the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is a death and life event. It joins us to Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. "We were buried ... with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ..., we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). It raises us with Christ now, so that we have a taste of life in the midst of this death. And it is the promise that on the Last Day, "We shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5). In Baptism, God kills us in order to make us alive.

Most importantly, we see this movement from death to life in Jesus himself. God the Father put God the Son to death. From the outward appearance of it, it looked like a tragic case of a righteous and innocent man being executed by jealous authorities. But that is not at all what happened. Here's what happened behind the mask: God the Son laid down his life willingly, and God the Father struck him. The Jews didn't kill Jesus. Rome didn't kill Jesus. His Father did. That might sound kind of scandalous. What kind of father kills his own son? But it wasn't a case of a father acting against his son. God the Father and God the Son were acting together with a unified will to put to death what was dead and dying. Jesus bore all of our sins in his body (1 Peter 2:24). He even became sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus assumed the death that we live in, and God the Father killed it in his Son. He killed his Son to bring him back to life, and with him, to bring us to life. Jesus moves from death to life. Having died once for all, he was made alive, and he lives forever as our crucified Savior and King.

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Because Jesus has done this, there are certain benefits he gives to all who trust in him. I'll give you three of them. I think these are the top three.

First, we know that our sins are forgiven. The resurrection of Jesus does not forgive our sins. Jesus' crucifixion forgives our sins. It was on the cross that he suffered and died as the sacrifice for our sins. The payment was complete when "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30). So the resurrection does not forgive our sins, but it proves that Jesus' sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father. Had Jesus died and just stayed dead, we would not know if it really worked or not. In fact, we would probably assume that it did not work, because Jesus had predicted that he would die and rise again. If he did not rise again, then he's not the Son of God,

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and he hasn't really paid the sacrifice for our sin. But Jesus did rise again. He proved that he is the Son of God, and his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for our sin. You have no reason to think your sin is too great. However great you think your sin may be, it is not more valuable than Jesus' blood, and it was not enough to hold him in the grave. He bore that sin in his body, because he bore all the sins of the entire world in his body (1 John 2:2), and that sin had no power to hold him in the grave. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that our sins are forgiven. That's the first benefit of Jesus' resurrection.

The second benefit is that we have new life now in the Holy Spirit. This is part of what we talked about earlier regarding Baptism. We still live in death. That will continue for a little while longer. But we have a taste of life. We fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we have fellowship with one another. Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We have a foretaste of the life to come, and the Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of this (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). That's the second benefit of Jesus' resurrection.

The third benefit is that this foretaste will one day come to fullness. At Christ's return, the dead will be raised. And I mean your real, physical body. Not only that, but all who trust in Jesus will be transformed after his perfect image. "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52). As he is now, so shall we become (1 John 3:2). Your body and spirit will be transformed. You will not die again. You will not suffer again. You will not lose again. You will not weep again. You will not sin again. You will not desire to sin, but you will delight in everything that is good, true, and beautiful. This seems so foreign to us, because we live in death, and we like those things that are wrong. We have trouble believing that not sinning is really going to be all that great. But this transformation includes the transformation of our desires. When we finally come into the fullness of life, our hearts will be set to love the things God created us to love in the first place. Our bodies and spirits will be transformed. You will no longer live death, but you will finally live life. That's the third benefit of Jesus' resurrection.

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God is bringing life out of death. He brings you out of death and into life by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death is passing away, and life is breaking through. Amen.

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He who testifies to these things says, "**Surely I am coming soon.**" Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)