

LUKE 24:1-12

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. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ 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. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.

THE LORD IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED. THIS IS THE EARTH SHATTERING AND SUPREMELY JOYOUS AND WONDERFUL PROCLAMATION THAT SPREAD AMONG THE DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

THE SAME PROCLAMATION CONTINUES TODAY, AND THEREFORE IT SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF THE JOY AND WONDER OF THE NEWS HAS DULLED SOME OVER TIME.

HOWEVER, WHILE THE NEWS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS NO LONGER A SURPRISE, AT LEAST FOR CHRISTIANS, IT IS NO LESS EARTHSHATTERING.

THE CHORUS OF A POPULAR HYMN "HE LIVES" POINTS OUT PART OF THE PROBLEM.

"HE LIVES, HE LIVES, CHRIST JESUS LIVES TODAY! HE WALKS WITH ME AND TALKS WITH ME ALONG LIFE'S NARROW WAY.

HE LIVES, HE LIVES, SALVATION TO IMPART! YOU ASK ME HOW I KNOW HE LIVES? HE LIVES WITHIN MY HEART."

THE PROBLEM IS NOT THAT THE MESSAGE IS FALSE, BUT RATHER IT DOES NOT TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH.

YES, JESUS LIVES IN THE HEART OF EVERY BELIEVER, HOWEVER EVEN IF JESUS DID NOT-HE IS STILL ALIVE.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION WAS PHYSICAL AND NOT JUST A SPIRITUAL EVENT-ALTHOUGH IT IS THAT AS WELL.

AFTER ALL IF JESUS HAD NOT BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD HIS STORY WOULD BE JUST ONE OF MANY ABOUT A GOOD PERSON, WHO FAITHFULLY SERVED GOD, BEING DESTROYED BY SIN AND EVIL.

THE BIBLICAL TESTIMONY THAT GOD RAISED JESUS BACK TO LIFE, IS PARAMOUNT TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND OUR SALVATION.

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS IS NOT ALWAYS REMEMBERED OR UNDERSTOOD.

FAR TOO OFTEN THE WORLDLY CELEBRATION OF EASTER TAKES PRECEDENCE EVEN AMONG CHRISTIANS, SO THE “REAL” CELEBRATION IS THE EGG HUNT, THE BUNNY, CANDY, AND OTHER FESTIVITIES.

EVEN IF THOSE SECULAR CELEBRATIONS DO NOT MEAN TO, THEY OFTEN CALL INTO QUESTION THE PRIMARY IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP AS CELEBRATION.

THE REASON CHRIST’S RESURRECTION IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER IS FOUND IN A QUESTION A YOUNG BOY HAD ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF GOING TO CHURCH ON EASTER.

IT HAPPENED ONE WARM AND SUNNY EASTER SUNDAY WHEN THE BOY FOUND HIMSELF, AGAINST HIS WILL, IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE FAMILY CAR ON HIS WAY TO CHURCH.

NOT ONLY WAS HE FORCED TO WEAR HIS BEST CLOTHES, BUT HAD NEW SHOES THAT PINCHED HIS FEET, AND HE WAS MADE TO WEAR A TIE THAT WAS ALMOST AS UNCOMFORTABLE AS HIS SHOES.

THE LAD WAS NOT A HAPPY CAMPER, SINCE HE WOULD RATHER BE OUTSIDE HUNTING EGGS, OR DOING JUST ABOUT ANYTHING BUT SPENDING AN HOUR OR SO IN CHURCH.

HIS PARENTS HEARD HIM QUIETLY MUTTER HIS DISPLEASURE, AS HE ASKED HIMSELF:

“I DON’T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH ON EASTER? THEY TELL THE SAME STORY EVERY YEAR AND THE ENDING NEVER CHANGES.”

OF COURSE, ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION IS: THE REASON WE GO TO CHURCH ON EASTER OR ANY OTHER DAY, IS PRECISELY BECAUSE THE STORY ALWAYS ENDS WITH THE MESSAGE “JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD.”

IF THE RESURRECTION WAS NOT THE ENDING THERE WOULD BE NO REASON TO EVER GO TO CHURCH.

IN FACT, THERE WOULD NOT BE ANY CHRISTIANS ANY PLACE IN THE WORLD, AND THEREFORE NO CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE APOSTLE PAUL EXPLAINS IT THIS WAY TO THE CORINTHIANS:

“IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE AND YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS.”

THIS IS THE HEART OF THE STORY, THE REASON FOR JESUS’ BIRTH, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

AND ALTHOUGH THE MESSAGE IS THE SAME, EACH GOSPEL WRITER TELLS THE STORY IN HIS OWN WAY, AND EACH VERSION DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

TODAY, LET US LOOK MORE CLOSELY TO THE STORY AS IT IS FOUND IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE.

HE TELLS US THAT MORE THAN THREE WOMEN WENT TO THE TOMB EARLY IN THE MORNING IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO DO ONE LAST ACT FOR JESUS, ANOINT HIS BODY, AS WAS THE CUSTOM.

THE TIMING OF HIS DEATH AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVENTED THEM FROM DOING THIS THE DAY HE DIED.

BUT WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT HIS TOMB, THEY WERE SHOCKED, AND A LITTLE FRIGHTENED TO FIND, JESUS WAS NOT THERE.

INSTEAD OF FINDING THE BODY OF JESUS THE WOMEN ENCOUNTERED TWO ANGELS, WHO LOOKED LIKE MEN IN DAZZLING GARMENTS.

THE WOMEN WERE TOLD JESUS WAS NOT THERE BECAUSE HE HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

THEY WERE REMINDED THAT JESUS TOLD THEM THAT HE WOULD BE CRUCIFIED AND DIE, BUT THEN WOULD BE RAISED TO LIFE AGAIN.

AFTER HEARING THOSE WORDS, THE WOMEN DID RECALL WHAT JESUS HAD TOLD THEM, AND THEY IMMEDIATELY WENT TO TELL HIS DISCIPLES THE WONDERFUL NEWS.

AND WHAT THEY TOLD THEM, WAS NOT TO GO TO LOOK AT THE EMPTY TOMB, BUT THAT JESUS IS RISEN, HE IS ALIVE AGAIN.

IMPLIED IN THEIR TESTIMONY TO THE RESURRECTION IS THAT JESUS WILL NOT BE FOUND AMONG THE DEAD, HE IS BACK AMONG THE LIVING, BACK WITH THEM.

ONLY THE DISCIPLES DID NOT BELIEVE THEM, PETER DID GO TO SEE THE TOMB HIMSELF, BUT HE DID NOT FIND THE BODY.

HE WAS AMAZED BY THE SIGHT OF THE EMPTY TOMB, BUT THAT WAS ALL. PETER HAD NOT YET GRASPED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE RESURRECTION.

IT WAS NOT UNTIL LATER WHEN JESUS ACTUALLY APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS THAT THE WOMEN'S TESTIMONY TURNED FROM AN IDLE TAKE, TO A STATEMENT OF THE TRUTH.

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED I SKIPPED OVER ONE SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF LUKE'S GOSPEL ACCOUNT, AND THAT IS THE FIRST THING THE ANGELS SAID TO THE WOMEN.

DO YOU REMEMBER THAT KEY EASTER QUESTION? IT ASKED: "WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?"

THIS QUESTION BRINGS TO THE SURFACE THE BIGGEST PROBLEM, AFTER SIN, JESUS FACED IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS.

THE PROBLEM WAS THEIR MINDS NEVER REALLY GRASPED WHAT THEIR EARS HEARD WHEN IT CAME TO JESUS SPEAKING ABOUT HIS MISSION.

THEY ALL WERE SHOCKED WHEN HE WAS CRUCIFIED AND DIED, AND THEY ALL GRIEVED HIS DEATH, ASSUMING THAT WAS THE END OF HIS STORY, AND THE END OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

ALL OF JESUS FOLLOWERS, MEN AND WOMEN ALIKE THOUGHT THEY UNDERSTOOD WHAT HAPPENED WHEN JESUS DIED. BUT THEY DID NOT.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS THAT HE WAS NOT THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

THEY ALSO THOUGHT HIS ENEMIES HAD WON AND THEY HAD LOST JESUS FOREVER.

REMEMBER, THE WOMEN DID NOT GO TO THE TOMB HOPING TO GREET THEIR RISEN LORD.

INSTEAD, THEY WENT WITH THE HOPE THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO GET INSIDE THE TOMB TO ANOINT HIS LIFELESS BODY.

YES INDEED, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THEIR DEAD MASTER AND TEACHER, NOT THEIR LIVING LORD AND SAVIOR.

IT WAS ONLY ON SUNDAY MORNING THAT THEY BEGAN TO DISCOVER JUST HOW WRONG THEY ALL WERE.

AS WE KNOW, THEY NEVER DID FIND THE BODY OF JESUS, BECAUSE HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD. THIS WAS THE POINT OF THE QUESTION THE WOMEN WERE ASKED.

THEY WERE BEING TOLD THEIR QUEST WAS FUTILE BECAUSE JESUS WAS ALIVE ONCE MORE-SO THEY WOULD NOT, COULD NOT FIND HIM INSIDE THE TOMB.

THEREFORE, WHILE FOR MOST CHRISTIANS, EVERY SUNDAY IS A CELEBRATION OF CHRISTI'S RESURRECTION, EASTER SUNDAY STILL IS SPECIAL.

IT IS SPECIAL BECAUSE IT BRINGS US BACK TO THE EMPTY TOMB, WHERE OUR JOURNEY BEGINS.

AND OUR DIRECTIONS FOR OUR JOURNEY ARE SIMPLE: "JESUS IS RISEN, GO FIND HIM."

WE INDEED ARE CALLED TO FIND JESUS, NOT JUST WITHIN OUR HEARTS, BUT WITHIN OTHERS, AND OUT IN THE WORLD WHERE HE AWAITS HIS FOLLOWERS, TO WORK WITH HIM.

THE PROBLEM IS WE DO NOT ALWAYS LOOK VERY HARD, IF AT ALL, FOR OUR RISEN SAVIOR.

INSTEAD LIKE THE WOMEN, CHRISTIANS AT TIMES LOOK FOR JESUS INSIDE THE TOMB INSTEAD OF OUT IN THE WORLD.

THIS WAS BROUGHT HOME TO FRANKLIN GRAHAM, SEVERAL YEARS AGO.

HE WAS INVITED TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE INSPIRED BY MEL GIBSON'S MOVIE "THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST".

ONE OF THE TOPICS DRAWN FROM THE MOVIE AND ELSEWHERE WAS THE QUESTION: "WHO KILLED JESUS?"

SOME ARGUED IT WAS THE JEWS, OTHERS INSISTED THE ROMANS WERE RESPONSIBLE.

ANOTHER GROUP SAID, SINCE ALL PEOPLE ARE SINNERS, EVERYONE COULD BE FOUND GUILTY OF KILLING JESUS.

FINALLY, FRANKLIN GRAHAM SPOKE UP, AND BASICALLY POINTED OUT THAT IT SERVED NO GOOD PURPOSE TO ARGUE ABOUT WHO KILLED JESUS, BECAUSE JESUS IS NOT DEAD.

HE MAKES A GOOD POINT, FAR TOO OFTEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY CHRISTIANS HAVE LOOKED FOR SOMEONE TO BLAME FOR THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS.

BUT TO DO SO, IS IN A WAY, TO LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD, AND THAT IS NOT WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO DO.

SCRIPTURE CALLS US TO LOOK FOR, AND LOOK TO, OUR RISEN SAVIOR.

TRULY, THE NEW TESTAMENT REMINDS US THAT THE EMPTY TOMB IS NOT OUR DESTINATION, BUT OUR STARTING POINT. AND THIS IS ONLY THE CASE BECAUSE JESUS IS ALIVE AGAIN.

YES, WE ARE SUPPOSE TO REMEMBER HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH, BUT ONLY BECAUSE HE IS RISEN.

IF JESUS WERE NOT ALIVE, FEW IF ANY TODAY, WOULD EVEN HAVE HEARD OF HIS DEATH, AND PROBABLY NO ONE WOULD REALLY CARE.

IT IS CHRIST'S DEATH, FOLLOWED BY HIS ACTUAL BODILY RESURRECTION THAT SETS JESUS APART FROM EVERY OTHER PERSON, INCLUDING EVERY OTHER RELIGIOUS FIGURE, NO MATTER HOW IMPORTANT THEY WERE.

AS THE OPENING VERSE OF "HE LIVES" PROCLAIMS: "I SERVE A RISEN SAVIOR, HE'S IN THE WORLD TODAY."

NO OTHER FAITH MAKES THAT CLAIM. A FEW TEACH REINCARNATION, BUT NOT RESURRECTION IN THE WAY IT HAPPENED TO JESUS.

THERE IS A SONG BY KEITH GREEN THAT SPEAKS TO THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION FOR OUR LIVES, A FEW OF THE LINES SAY:

"HEAR THE BELLS RINGING THEY'RE SINGING THAT YOU CAN BE BORN AGAIN. HEAR THE BELLS RINGING THEY'RE SINGING CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

JOY TO THE WORLD, HE HAS RISEN, HALLELUJAH. HE'S RISEN, HALLELUJAH, HE'S RISEN, HALLELUJAH!"

THIS IS THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF THE EMPTY TOMB. AND, IT IS THE BASIS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS, AS WELL AS THE REASON ANYONE KNOWS OR CARES ABOUT HIM TODAY.

YES INDEED, JESUS IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND HE GOES AHEAD OF US.

HE CALLS US TO SEEK HIM IN AMONG THE LIVING OF ALL NATIONS AND RACES, ECONOMIC CLASSES, AND LIFE STYLES.

JESUS CALLS US TO SEEK HIM IN THE WORLD, AMONG-PEOPLE JUST LIKE US, AND THOSE WHO ARE NOTHING LIKE US.

IN CLOSING I SHARE A SAYING FOUND ON AN OLD EASTER BULLETIN COVER: "HE WALKED THE EARTH TO KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE HUMAN. HE SUFFERED THE PAIN OF DEATH ON A CROSS TO SET US FREE. HE ROSE FROM DEATH TO BRING US EVERLASTING LIFE. HE GAVE US THE HOLY SPIRIT SO WE WOULD NEVER WALK ALONE." AMEN

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