

## “Lookin’ for Love in All the Wrong Places”

Luke 24:1-12

<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. (ESV)

I’ve been in ministry for 15 years or more. There are only twelve passages, really, about the Resurrection. In fact this year an old intern of mine who is now a senior pastor wrote me and said, “Man, I’m dying here. Easter is the hardest thing to preach because it’s the same message, isn’t it?” I wrote him back and said, “Yes, it is, and no it isn’t. I know how you feel, but you just need to work on it.” So, one way to start, I told him, is to open with a joke.

We have three guys. Let’s call them Rob, Bob, and Jim. Rob, Bob, and Jim are hanging out and they’re talking about things, and Rob says, “Guys, let’s say you were dead. Let’s say it’s your funeral and there’s a casket and you are dead and lying in front of everybody. What would you want people to say if they could say anything about you? What would you hope they’d say about you at your funeral?” He said, “I know what I’d like them to say. I’d like them to say, ‘Rob was a servant of humanity. He was a great philanthropist. Everywhere he went the world was changed.’ That’s what I would hope they’d say. How about you, Bob?” Bob said, “You know, my ambitions aren’t like yours. I hope that if I’m lying in the casket in front of everybody someone will stand up and say, ‘He was a good husband and he was a good father.’ How about you, Jim?” Jim said, “Honestly, if I’m lying in a casket in front of everybody, what would I hope they’d say? I would hope someone would say, ‘Hey, look! He moved!’”

Most people are afraid of death but not as many people are hopeful of resurrection. Right? A lot of people know, “Someday you gotta go.” But not as many spend their time focusing on the hope of resurrection – the hope of new life. In the church at Easter we do that every year. Today is the church’s biggest holiday. It’s not Christmas, it’s today because today we focus on this whole idea of resurrection. What it is and what its importance is, and what it has to do with us.

Today’s passage is interesting because Jesus doesn’t appear in this passage but it tells us everything we need to know about the Resurrection. We’re going to look at three things in this morning’s passage. The first thing we’re going to look at is the big “But” of the gospel. That’s “B-U-T” with one “T”. I saw you kids snickering out there. It’s the big “But” of the gospel. The second thing we’re going to look at is the promise of the gospel. The third thing we’ll look at is, “How are you going to respond to that promise?”

Why is the big “But” of the gospel so important? If you’ve heard me preach before, I often say the most important word in the whole Bible is the word “but.” The reason the word “but” is so important is because normally anything that comes before the word “but” you just delete – it doesn’t exist. For example, this morning I was fully intending to wear a tie on Easter. But... See how that works? I don’t have a tie on. Actually I was going to wear a white shirt and one of my daughters insisted I wear this pastel thing and I didn’t have a tie that I thought matched. So, anyhow, you get the idea. Whenever you say “but” it gets rid of everything that came before. Did you notice this morning when I read the text– what word it started with? It started with the word, “but,” which means it’s the opposite of whatever came before. What came before the very first line of this text was the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Jesus was crucified and killed and buried in a tomb. That’s a fact. One of the things that people say is, “Maybe the resurrection isn’t true because Jesus really didn’t die.” If anything is attested to, it’s the fact that Jesus died. The Jews knew it, the disciples knew it, and the Romans knew it. The women followed Him to the tomb, they saw Him placed in the tomb and they saw guards placed around the tomb. Everyone knew that Jesus was dead, stone cold, “assume room temperature” dead. And the women went to anoint His body, yet it was the Sabbath and so they waited and rested on the Sabbath. Then it says, “But, the next day . . .” As soon as they could get back to the tomb to embalm Jesus and to anoint His body, they were there. Let me read what that says.

<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. (ESV)

Imagine their surprise when they went back to the tomb. What they expected to find was the tomb of Jesus, first of all. The tomb would have been carved out of stone, and it would have had a rail in front where they would have rolled a huge stone in front of it. The stone would have probably weighed about a ton. So they would have expected to find the tomb, they would have expected

to find the stone intact, and they would have expected to find Roman guards around the tomb. When they got to the tomb what they found was...crickets... meaning nothing. They got to the tomb and the guards had gone, we know that from Matthew; they had fled. But also the stone had been rolled away. So on one hand they found the stone but they didn't find something else. If you were they, would you not be surprised? If you went to the cemetery now to visit a friend or a loved one, and you got there and there was just a big hole in the ground where you expected to find your friend or beloved, wouldn't that surprise you? With me, if nothing else, I'd think, "Where did they move him?" It invites a deeper look in, so they went in and looked in the tomb. While they had found the tomb they did not find the body of Jesus. Understandably they were perplexed. They didn't know what to make of it. As they were standing there perplexed, two men in dazzling clothing appeared. Now, who are these men in dazzling clothing? We find out later that they're angels, but we know from the response of the women that they are probably angels because the women bow down before them and reverence them, and that's what people always do when angels show up. As they're perplexed and as they're bowing before the angels, the angels ask the million-dollar question – this rhetorical question. But it's a great question. The angels

<sup>5</sup> . . . said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

More specifically, the Greek there says, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead ones?" What is the implication of their question? The implication of the question is that Jesus is not dead any more, and if you're looking for a live person you don't go to the cemetery to find him. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The sermon title today was a tribute to Mickey Gilley. The women were "looking for love in all the wrong places." They were looking for Jesus in a place where He was not to be found. I read a sermon this week by Charles Spurgeon on this passage. Charles Spurgeon is my favorite preacher. He died about 150 years ago. Spurgeon asked a great question. "If Jesus is love, and Jesus is forgiveness, and Jesus is acceptance, and if Jesus is our righteousness and our justification, if Jesus is all these things to us how often do we look for Him in places where He is not to be found?" Consider your own righteousness and the law. Can the Ten Commandments love you? Can the Ten Commandments hold you? Can the Ten Commandments forgive you? Can they comfort you? They can't. So if you're looking for Jesus there you won't find Him – wrong place. How about acceptance? Let me give you a news flash I know about every single person in this room. It's that you're pretty dramatically and drastically insecure. Right? I know that because I am. Where do you look to get that acceptance that you need? Where do you look to get that approval that you crave? Do you look to other people, or do you look to the only person who can give it to you – Jesus? If you're not looking at Jesus you are functionally seeking the living among the dead because you can't find it any other place.

Spurgeon gives about ten different examples. He's quite verbose. I'm going to give you three. How about politics? Is that where you're trying to find Jesus? Is that where you're trying to find life change and world change? No matter what you're political stripe is, whether you're Republican or you're Democrat or you're Independent or something else, it can't change you. Are some economic systems better than others? I think so. Are some political systems better than others? I think so. But at the end of the day, if you're looking for a political system to change someone's heart, it's not going to happen. You're looking for the living among the dead. You're looking for Jesus in a place you can't find Him. Where are you going to find Jesus? The place you find Jesus now is at the right hand of God the Father. When Jesus rose from the dead, He not only rose from the dead but He ascended to the right hand of God the Father and now He is ruler over all of creation. That's where you find Jesus. The women are perplexed about this, and they're perplexed at that question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Now, what's the remedy for perplexity? The remedy for perplexity apparently in this text is remembrance. That's where the angels take the women next. They remind them of the promise of the gospel. Let's look at the next thing. The angels say,

<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.* (ESV)

Now, it's interesting what the angels do here, as most of us read that verse as a question as if the angels are saying, "Come on, girls, don't you remember when Jesus said these things?" The angels are not asking a question of these women. They're not using the interrogative. They're using the imperative. In other words, they're not asking, "Do you remember?" They're telling them, they're commanding them, "Remember." "Remember what Jesus said. You're perplexed now. If you want your perplexity to be gone, remember what Jesus taught you when He was in Galilee." The angels mention, apparently, the big three that they want the women to remember because Jesus taught a whole lot of things. But what are the three things that the angels remind them of that Jesus taught them that is going to be the remedy of their confusion? The first thing is that Jesus was to be delivered over into the hands of sinful men. Why is that important? Because when you consider that Jesus was delivered over into the hands of sinful men it helps you to understand the depth of God's love for you. On one hand Jesus gave Himself up; on the other hand God the Father gave Jesus the Son over to be crucified. God gave Jesus. I found myself singing one of my favorite hymns as I was walking over to church today. The only way I can remember the line is to sing it, so you're going to have to forgive me. Do you know the hymn, "How Deep the Father's Love?"

How deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure.

That He should give His only Son To make a wretch His treasure.

I didn't make it through the last line in the first two services. Do you want to know how much God loves you? The person He gave, His Son Jesus, the thing that He loved the most He gave over and gave perfection over to be crucified so that He could make a wretch His treasure - so that He could make you His treasure. That's how much God desires you - so much that He would deliver over His own on, and deliver Him over to be crucified. Why is crucifixion so important?

This week, on Friday actually – Good Friday, we carried out a tradition in our household. This tradition is when our daughters turn twelve years old on their birthday or very close about there, I take them to the lumber yard and they pick out wood so I can make a hope chest for them. It's a big process. My youngest daughter, Mercy, is twelve and her birthday was in August. We've moved and we just hadn't had the time, and finally in fine Allen tradition she skipped school this past Friday. Having skipped school we went to the lumberyard. The guys there know me and I asked the head guy, "We're looking for some cherry, can you point me to where you have the best stuff?" We were walking back and he started to pull some stuff down. He said, "Pastor, I'm glad you're here today." I said, "Because I'm getting ready to spend a lot of money?" He said, "Well, that, and the boys and I were sitting around and we're trying to figure out why today is Good Friday." I said, "You're kidding me, right?" He said, "No, why is it Good Friday? No one here knows. Tell me." I said, "Well, it's Good Friday because Jesus was crucified today." He said, "How's that good?" I said, "Because it was Him and not you." He said, "You've got a point there." You see, the crucifixion was not good for Jesus. In fact it was horrible. But why Good Friday is Good Friday is because it's good for you and it's good for me because Jesus lived the life we should have lived and then He died the death that we should have died. When He rose from the dead, the very next thing the angels say, He was delivered over, He was crucified, and on the third day He would rise. When He rose from the dead, what He was doing was showing that the sacrifice He had made was acceptable in the sight of God the Father. If you think about it, if Jesus was crucified but then never rose from the dead, how would you ever know that it really meant anything? People might say, "Well, Jesus died for your sins." And you'd say, "Well, yeah. A lot of guys were crucified. What's the big deal? How do I know that Jesus died for my sins? I just know that He died." The answer is, "Because He rose for you as well. When Jesus rose He showed that God had accepted His sacrifice, but not only that, Jesus was the first-born of all creation and He was the first-born among the dead, and because Jesus rose from the dead you and I can have hope that we will rise as well, and we will rise in Him and to Him.

The question is, "What are you going to do with the information now?" There are basically three ways to respond to this information – this message of the gospel. You see them all here. The first way you see is the way that the women respond. The second way is the way the apostles responded, and the third way is the way that Peter responds. Let me read to you first how the women and the apostles respond.

*<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.*

So what's the response to the gospel? The first response to the gospel that you see here is the response of faith. What's interesting to me is that whenever you look at the Resurrection accounts, the response of faith is always coupled with either a command to go and tell others or an immediate going and telling others without having to be told. In other words, if the gospel message is true and you really believe it, there's a sense in which you cannot contain it. Many of you have heard the story when I teach the Discovery Class about when I became a Christian. I grew up and we did not go to church. Some girls invited me to a camp when I was a senior in high school. When I was there, the first night of the camp the speaker talked about sin and the fact that God punishes sin, and then he said, "Good night, kids." I was broken. I went outside and I was begging someone, "How do I get rid of this burden?" A guy I used to wrestle against told me about Jesus. I remember driving home from that camp – it was from North Carolina all the way to South Florida. I remember asking the leader of the camp, "If this is true, why doesn't everyone tell people about Jesus?" He said, "Well, you know. Some people are plumbers, and some people are accountants, and some people are police officers. Some people tell people about Jesus." Now mind you, I'd not gone to church really more than two or three times in my whole life and yet I can remember as if it were yesterday sitting on that bus thinking, "That is the most bogus thing I've ever heard in my life. It just doesn't make since if people are dying and going to hell and Jesus saved them from their sins, how could you not tell people?" The response of faith when you look at the New Testament is always telling people. So those of you here who say you have faith, where are you at with telling people? Now, it may be that you go out and tell people verbally, but it might be you participate in gathering activities. Maybe you work at the Welcome Center or something. Are you participating in the work of other people coming to know Jesus? It's the natural outworking of faith.

Conversely, the women came and told everything to the apostles and to all the rest. And did you see how the apostles responded? It says they thought what they were telling them was idle chat, or in the Greek another way to read it is "crazy talk." "You girls, everything you're saying is just crazy talk." It says, "They did not believe them." Here's the irony of it – that these were apostles. By definition their job was to go out and preach the gospel. By definition they were the ones responsible for taking this message of Jesus to the world, and yet when the women come back and say, "Everything that He said was true! We know that He was delivered, we know that He was crucified, and remember He said He would be raised. We went there and he wasn't there,

but the angels were there. The whole thing's true." And the apostles said, "Aaa, get out of here! We don't believe it. It's crazy talk." Now why would they say that? Was it because they lacked evidence? I don't think so. I've never met anyone who pursued the evidence for the crucifixion or evidence for the resurrection that hasn't come away a believer. So there has to be something else that kept them from believing. The disciples, if they were thinking rationally, could have thought, "Well, only a few things could happen. Either we stole the body, which we didn't, or the Jews stole the body, which the whole reason they put guards there was so that no one could steal the body so that no one could make up a bogus claim about His resurrection. Or the women didn't know where the tomb was, but we know they know where the tomb was." They could have rationally worked their way down to say, "Well, it must be true." But what's underneath and behind unbelief is not necessarily, or almost never, evidence. When I talk to our staff here, especially the youth guys, they'll come and say, "I have a problem. A person's coming in and they want to talk about 'this.'" I'll say, "You can do that, but as long as you remember that 'this' is never 'that.'" They go, "Huh?" In other words, the 'thing' is never the 'thing.' Generally speaking, when you're counseling, people will come and say, "I want to talk about 'A.'" But really they want to talk about "B." So the question is, "How am I going to get to 'B' because I know there's something else behind this?" I think it's the same with the apostles. Did the apostles refuse to believe because they spent three years with Jesus and weren't persuaded? The apostles refused to believe, I think, for the same reason that a lot of you refuse to believe. Jesus let them down. Jesus talked about suffering, He talked about dying, He talked about all these things, but really Jesus loved them and that's what mattered. Jesus took care of them and that's what mattered. And when Jesus died on the cross He let them down. He said He would be there with them forever. He told them that and now He's gone. "It's been three days and you expect us to believe all this hooey about Him coming back? Jesus let me down and I'm never going to trust Him again." Any of you ever think that? A lot of people will come to church only on Easter because their parents made them or because your children made you. That's what you would think. Jesus let you down. "Why would I ever go back there?" The problem is, if you feel like Jesus let you down and you left the church, it's because you left church on Friday and you didn't come back on Sunday. Bad things happen to everybody. Everybody. Do you have hope in the midst of those bad things? Avoiding Jesus and leaving Jesus is not the place to find hope. The disciples at this point were hopeless and full of despair. All of them were but one. Did you notice the last "but" in this passage?

<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. (ESV)*

The first response that you see is faith. The second response you see is unbelief. And the third response you see is what I'm going to call the "Peter response." The apostles did not believe, but Peter stood and ran. What made Peter different than anyone else? You see, this verse is one of those conundrums for people who write Bible commentaries because it doesn't really tell you whether Peter believed or didn't believe. It doesn't tell you if he was encouraged or not. It says that, "He stood and he ran." What is that supposed to mean? I think that's the point. You see, if the apostles were upset and unbelieving because they thought Jesus let them down, Peter knew that if Jesus let Him down, he had let Jesus down more. It's almost as if Peter's sin and guilt are directly related to his arrogance. Remember during Jesus' life Jesus would say, "The Son of Man must suffer and die." Peter says, "Over my dead body you will!" Jesus says, "Peter, you will betray me. You will deny me three times before the rooster crows." Peter says, "I would rather die." The next thing you hear is the rooster, and Peter had denied Jesus three times. Peter had fallen. Peter stands there as they're taking Jesus to beat Him and mock Him and crucify Him, and in Luke's gospel it says He looked right at Peter and Peter wept bitterly. And if Jesus did not rise from the dead, think about where that leaves Peter. In other words, the last big event in Peter's life was denying the one he loved the most. It was totally screwing up everything in his whole life. "If Jesus didn't rise from the dead that means my best friend is dead and I have His death and everything else on my conscience. My life is over." I think the reason Peter stood and ran to the tomb is because he needed the Resurrection to be true, because if the Resurrection wasn't true then Peter was stuck in his guilt and his sin. But, if the Resurrection was true there is hope for Peter. If Jesus can bear our sins and then be raised from the dead, Peter could fall and then perhaps he could be restored.

Martin Luther loved to write about Peter. One of the things I remember reading him saying about Peter is, "If Peter fell then I too may fall. And if Peter was raised up again and restored, then I too may be raised up and restored." For those of us out there saying, "My sin is too big, my guilt is too big. I don't know what to do with it," I would encourage you this morning if nothing else, to have Peter's response – to run to the tomb and see. See if it's true. Pursue Jesus. Ask questions. Find a friend who's a Christian and ask him or her, "What does this all mean? Do I really have hope?" Because without the Resurrection you really don't have hope. Without the Resurrection where do you turn? Without the Resurrection where is the restoration?

I left the ministry for a while. Jeff Jeremiah and I were having lunch with a pastor who said, "I thought you were gone. I thought you'd never be back." I said, "You know your problem?" He said, "What?" I said, "Apparently when you throw someone in a garbage dump and leave them there you don't expect them to come back. But in the gospel they always do." If Jesus rose, you can rise. Not only ultimately and eventually, but even now from the midst of your sin and sorrow. Think about that.