

## Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary

### Session 4

#### Resurrected!

#### Luke 24:1-12

**Context:** Acts 2:14-46; Luke 23:1–24:51

**Memory Verse:** Acts 2:32

**Main Idea:** Salvation through faith in the Resurrected Son is the message of the church.

#### FIRST THOUGHTS

Great messages carry a profound ability to stimulate change, motivate hope, and define a future. Consider the impact of the following statements delivered by individuals of historical note:

- *Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!*—Patrick Henry, in a 1775 speech calling for Virginians to take up arms in the American colonies' struggle for independence from Great Britain.
- *We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, ... in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender!*—Winston Churchill, in a speech to the British House of Commons on June 4, 1940, after the Battle of Dunkirk.
- *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*—Martin Luther King, Jr., in a speech on August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, calling for racial justice and freedom in America for all of its citizens—black and white, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic.

*(In PSG, p. 43) Think about a message you have heard that motivated a change in your actions and attitude. What about the message caused you to respond?*

Magnificent messages can shape the trajectory of an individual life or, indeed, a nation. There is one message, however, that has the power to change the course of our eternal destiny. It is the message first delivered at a Jerusalem cemetery in the early dawn of a long-ago Sunday morning: He is not here, but is risen! The proclamation of Jesus' resurrection from the dead remains the most powerful, life-changing message in human history. It is the glorious message of the Lord's forgiveness of our sin and victory over death.

#### UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

##### Acts 2:14-46; Luke 23:1—24:51

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax of the Luke's Gospel and the central message of the church's proclamation in Acts. Luke 23 records the trials of Jesus before Pilate and Herod. Luke described the cowardice of the Roman leader, the perverted curiosity of Herod, and the false accusations of the religious leaders who pushed for Jesus' crucifixion. Following Jesus' death on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea asked for and received the body of Jesus for burial. He prepared Jesus' body and buried Him in a new tomb. The courageous women who followed Jesus waited until the Sabbath was over to anoint His body as an expression of their love. A resurrected Jesus appeared to them and others over a period of 40 days and ascended into heaven. Fifty days after Passover, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, stood to explain these events to the people in Jerusalem.

When Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, he explained the supernatural abilities of believers to speak in languages previously unknown to them as the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He then preached the gospel to the startled crowd in Jerusalem. He declared Jesus to be the Son of God who was crucified by evil men. In God's providence, the death of Christ was God's way of providing salvation for every sinner who repented and trusted Jesus as Savior. Peter declared the resurrection of Jesus from the

dead as proof of the gospel and urged everyone to believe and be saved. Over 3,000 people trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and were baptized.

In this session we will examine Luke's description of the women's discovery of the empty tomb and point out how Peter used these truths in his first sermon. The resurrection of Jesus is essential to the gospel and foundational to Christianity. Paul would later state that if the resurrection were not true, his preaching and our faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). The resurrection of Jesus has profound implications for believers today. We share in the resurrection power of Jesus in our victory over sin daily. The resurrection of Jesus also guarantees our resurrection when He returns.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### AN EMPTY TOMB (Luke 24:1-3)

*<sup>1</sup> On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*

#### VERSE 1

The *first day of the week* was Sunday. Jesus was crucified on Friday and buried that same day. The proximity of the Sabbath (Saturday) necessitated haste in the burial of Jesus and prevented the women from anointing Jesus' body. We cannot be sure of their knowledge of the anointing done by Joseph and Nicodemus. Even if the women were aware, they wanted to add their spices as a personal gift of love. The Greek word translated *spices* is the basis for our word *aroma*. These spices were expensive and an important ceremonial component of Jewish burials. Luke's account uniquely mentions the spices brought to the tomb.

The women came to the tomb of Jesus expecting to find His body. None of the disciples of Jesus understood or believed the prophecies He made regarding His resurrection. Some have suggested the resurrection account was the product of wishful thinking. The truth is that there was no apparent hope or anticipation of Jesus' resurrection by His followers on that first Easter morning.

#### VERSES 2-3

When the women arrived, they were surprised to find *the stone rolled away* from the entrance. Jews preferred burial above ground in caves or rock-cut tombs. The body would be placed on a rock-hewn slab. After deterioration, the bones would be collected and stored in an ossuary (a container often made of stone) elsewhere in the burial chamber. Stones were placed in front of the entrance of tombs to keep animals or scavengers away.

The women entered but *did not find the body* of Jesus. They could not immediately understand what had happened. All they knew was that the tomb where Jesus had been placed was empty. The empty tomb was a fact that everyone, including Jesus' enemies, conceded. Jesus' disciples would declare Jesus was resurrected, and the unbelieving religious authorities would claim His body was stolen (Matt. 28:13).

Fifty days later, Peter would stand before the crowds in Jerusalem and proclaim Jesus had risen from the dead. If the enemies of the church wanted to stop Christianity in its infancy, producing the body of Jesus was all that would have been necessary. They could not, and the empty tomb provided evidence to affirm the declaration of Peter and the early disciples.

*(In PSG, p. 45) How does the empty tomb serve as a testimony of Jesus' identity? How can you use the fact of the empty tomb to witness to the lost today?*

### FULL DISCLOSURE (Luke 24:4-8)

*<sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. <sup>5</sup> So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" asked the men. <sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?'" <sup>8</sup> And they remembered His words.*

#### VERSES 4-5

The women who came to anoint Jesus' body were confused. They did not assume Jesus had risen from the dead and were at a loss as to how to interpret the scene at the empty tomb. God provided an explanation when *two men stood by them in dazzling clothes*. The description of these individuals suggested they were angels; Luke would later specifically refer to them as angels (Luke 24:23). Angels are important messengers in Luke's Gospel. They appeared to Zechariah and predicted the birth of John the Baptist (1:13) and to Mary concerning the birth of Jesus (1:35). Angels appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (2:10). In each of

these instances God sent His messengers to inform and explain events that would otherwise not be known or properly understood. The women at the tomb needed divine revelation to understand the resurrection of Jesus.

Fear is a common reaction to the appearance of angels in biblical revelation (1:12; 2:10). The angels asked them why they were searching for *the living among the dead*. Their question was an unveiled proclamation that Jesus was not dead but alive. Jesus could not be found in a tomb because He was alive.

### VERSE 6-8

What was implied in the question about why the women sought the living among the dead is now made explicit. The angels declared Jesus had risen from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus was not merely a spiritual one that left His body behind. Jesus uniquely experienced a bodily resurrection. His resurrection was different from every other resuscitation of the dead in the Bible. Other people were brought back to physical life but would one day experience death again. Jesus' resurrection was a permanent transformation and an example of the kind of resurrection all believers will receive in the future (see 1 Cor. 15:23).

The angels urged the women to *remember* that Jesus had predicted He would be delivered *into the hands of sinful men* (Luke 9:44), *crucified* (9:22), and would *rise on the third day* (9:22). Looking back, they understood Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen and when it would occur. They gained a greater understanding of the intentional nature of Jesus' life and ministry. He had not been caught up in circumstances out of His control but submitted to these events in obedience to God's sovereign plan.

The sovereignty of God in the events surrounding the arrest, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus is an important theme in Peter's first sermon on Pentecost. Peter began his sermon by stating that the miracles performed by Jesus demonstrated God's approval of Him (Acts 2:22). He next described the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus as a part of God's predetermined plan (v. 23). Peter did not absolve those who betrayed and crucified Jesus as puppets of divine power. He described them as godless men who acted on their own volition (v. 23). God overruled their evil desires to provide an atoning sacrifice for sins through the death of Jesus on the cross. There is no greater example in the Bible of the tension between human responsibility and divine sovereignty.

Peter proceeded in his sermon from the death to the resurrection of Jesus. He declared that Jesus was raised by the Father in approval of His saving work on the cross (v. 24). Peter further demonstrated the resurrection as a part of God's eternal plan with a reminder that the resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. Peter appealed to Psalm 16:8-11 to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled a prophecy first given by David. Peter skillfully pointed out that the promise given to David that his body would not undergo decay (Acts 2:27) could not apply to David since he died and his tomb was nearby (v. 29). The prophecy was fulfilled, Peter declared, in Jesus Christ who came as the Messiah from the line of David (vv. 30-31). Peter then declared that he and many others present were witnesses of the resurrected Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus became the final proof of the true identity of Jesus in Peter's sermon. The fact that God raised Him from the dead in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 16 was irrefutable evidence that Jesus was Savior, Lord, and Christ. The powerful but invisible saving effects of Jesus' death on the cross were verified by the visible resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

*What proofs of the resurrection of Jesus would you use in witnessing to others?*

### COMPLETE AMAZEMENT (Luke 24:9-12)

*<sup>9</sup> Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. <sup>11</sup> But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

### VERSES 9-10

The explanation of the empty tomb by the angels and remembering Jesus' prediction to rise from the dead convinced the women of Jesus' resurrection. They immediately went to tell the disciples (referred to as *the Eleven*) of the news. Luke's last mention of the disciples as the Twelve was when Judas betrayed Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:47).

Luke listed some of the prominent women who were present for the discovery of the empty tomb. *Mary Magdalene* was from Magdala, a town on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mary became a follower of Jesus after He cast out seven demons that tormented her (Luke 8:2). She was the first person to see the risen Jesus (John 20:1-18). *Joanna* was as "the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward" (Luke 8:3). She was one of many Galilean followers who provided monetary and material support to Jesus during His ministry. The second *Mary* was *the mother of James*. The Greek text does not include the word *mother*, but the construction favors the interpretation (see Mark 15:40 where the entire Greek phrase *the mother of James* occurs). Luke added that *other women* were also present.

We should not overlook two important truths regarding the women's discovery of the empty tomb. First, we should note their courage in contrast to the fear of the eleven disciples who were in hiding. These women stand out as the most courageous of Jesus' followers in these dangerous days. They did not know the soldiers would not be present when they set out for the tomb, and they did not know how they would roll the stone away. They only knew that they loved Jesus and wanted to honor Him by anointing His body for burial. Their courage was rewarded with the opportunity to be the first ones to learn of the resurrection.

Secondly, we think nothing today of the gender of these first witnesses. In the first century A.D., however, women were considered by some to be unreliable witnesses. The Bible contains no such prejudice against the reliable testimony of women. God's Word honors them, and their testimony will always be remembered as the foundation for the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## **VERSES 11-12**

When the women came and told the apostles about what they had seen and heard, *they did not believe*. We are reminded again of the absence of any anticipation of the resurrection. The eleven disciples would need to be convinced of a truth they found impossible to believe based only on the testimony of others. They did not believe the resurrection had occurred but wanted to know what had happened. Peter *ran to the tomb* and *saw only the linen cloths*. These were the wrappings that had covered the body of Jesus after His death on the cross (Luke 23:53). The amazement Peter experienced following his viewing of the evidence at the tomb was a first confirmation of the resurrection that would soon be reinforced by his personal encounters with the risen Christ.

Following the post-resurrection encounters with Jesus, Peter stood before the crowd in Jerusalem and proclaimed boldly that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:32). Earlier, following Jesus' proof of His resurrection to Thomas, He commended those who would believe in the resurrection by faith in the testimony of others (John 20:29). More than 3,000 people believed based on Peter's testimony at Pentecost, and they became the first of multitudes who have believed that Jesus died for their sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. They received the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit as Jesus promised and were called to share their faith and experiences with others.

The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. Sorrow was eclipsed by joy and hope replaced despair. The women came to the tomb with the task of anointing a decaying body, and they left praising God and telling others of the risen Savior. The experience of the women at the tomb depicts the transformation of lives that encounter the risen Lord through believing faith. We come to Christ spiritually dead and separated from the life of God. We are without hope in the world. When we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day, we are united to Him in His death and resurrection (see Rom. 6:1-11). We come to Christ in spiritual death, and we receive life everlasting through faith in Him.

The responsibility and privilege of every believer who has received Jesus Christ as Savior is to tell others. The church was never meant to be a secret society or guardian of hidden knowledge. We are called to make Christ known, and we are not to rest until everyone has heard the glorious news discovered by the women on the first Easter morning. The encouraging message of Acts is that we are not on our own in sharing this miraculous story about Jesus. We have been promised the power of the Holy Spirit to help us and to convince others of the truth. The power of the Holy Spirit is present and powerful in the lives of faithful believers. Many in our world have never heard, and there are some that only you can reach through your witness, prayers, and giving to the cause of missions.

*(In PSG, p. 49) Describe how the empty tomb changed the lives of the people present that Sunday. How are these changes seen in the lives of people who trust Jesus today?*

## **KEY DOCTRINE**

### *Salvation*

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

## **BIBLE SKILL**

*Use Scripture to understand the meaning of an event.*

Read Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36. Look for how Peter interpreted the events of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Underline words or phrases Peter used to describe Jesus. Read the passage aloud, emphasizing phrases that point to Jesus' resurrection. Record insights you gained by reading Peter's sermon aloud.

## **BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR**

For additional context, read "Women as Eyewitnesses," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator).