

Luke 23:50-24:12

The Living Among the Dead

Intro: There is a great call to worship in Ps 118:24. “This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

- This is even more true in light of the resurrection. It’s been said that Christianity is the religion of resurrection. That’s what turns us from gloomy people to glad. An unhappy worshiper is really a contradiction. The resurrection crystalizes our gladness.

Before we dig into the text, let’s look again at the opening (Lk 1:1-4).

- One of the main motives for Luke writing is to give *certainty*. The resurrection is something that requires *certainty*.

The way the Bible presents the resurrection does not leave it open to doubt or exploration. We don’t take a journey of faith and maybe decide to pick up the resurrection—faith requires “certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

(1 Cor 15:17-19)\

“¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile..... ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

- We saw the cross really emphasized the last few weeks; it has been the overwhelming focus.
- But salvation is not the cross by itself; the cross is one major part of the redemptive package.
- The Salvation package is a crucified, risen, and reigning Savior.

There are two main units in our passage. One gives us a picture of discipleship, the other displays the power of the resurrection.

1) Devoted Discipleship (23:50-56)

- Even though Jesus is the central focus of this section, the actions and activities of his followers are instructive for us. We get pictures of devoted discipleship.

- Joseph and the group of women are the faithful remaining few.

Devoted discipleship in 3 areas: —character, courage, and commitment.

1. Character

- We know that Joseph is a disciple (Mt 27:57).
- Luke throws in the fact that Joseph dissented from the council's decision to crucify Jesus.
- Notice how he is described as (v50) good and righteous...and looking for the kingdom of God.
- Other godly people are described positively, earlier in Luke (Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna).
- This does not mean that their good deeds and righteousness merited them salvation —every disciple must look outside of himself to Christ.
- Yet, character marks Christ's followers.

Dedicated discipleship is about good character. Character development is a lifelong project. The most godly people will always know they have a long way to go still. But there is not dedicated discipleship without a commitment to goodness and righteousness.

2. Courage

- A second mark of dedicated discipleship is courage (v52).
- In 19:38 noted how Joseph was a secret disciple.
- His actions now make his commitment way more public. Mk 15:43 stresses that it was an act of courage to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus's body.
- It also took courage to go against the grain of the council and not condemn Jesus—*disciples have to do some things that will make them really unpopular at times.*
- It would also take courage to go back to the site of the crucifixion and remove Jesus's bloody body from the cross.

3. Commitment

- Dedicated discipleship is committed.
- We can see this stretched all the way back to the Parable of the Sower.

- Spectacular growth in a short period of time means nothing.

Joseph shows a level of commitment. It's his family tomb that Jesus will be laid in (cf Mt 27:60). Crucified bodies were not typically put in tombs but buried in a common pit.

A true commitment costs us something, often it costs us a lot.

- The focus now shifts to the role of the women (v55)—the women of 24:10.
- The women who follow Jesus often show the highest level of consistent, stable commitment.

—Churches tend to fall into two extremes regarding the roles of women:

1. Some see no distinctions and flatten the roles out. Women end up doing everything that men do (e.g. preaching, becoming elders).
2. Other churches have strong male leadership but have little or no place for women outside of taking care of kids.

Both miss the New Testament.

—*Women play a critical role in church life.* They serve, make disciples and teach other women. My experience in my first church: without the women the church would practically fall apart.

Jesus valued the role of women who followed him—he did not name any apostles—there are distinct roles—but women always hold a critical role in the life of church and its' mission to make disciples.

- The picture of commitment for us finally comes from both Joseph and the women. It's a picture of their *commitment to obey scripture.*
- Joseph was not doing just a nice compassionate act of removing Jesus's body. He was living out Dt 21:22-23.
- Same with the women. In v55 They have a commitment to keep the 4th commandment of resting on the Jewish Sabbath day (Saturday).

Apply: *The acid test of dedicated discipleship is keeping God's Word.* Keeping it when it's inconvenient, not popular. Are we that committed to God's truth?

When I was a new believer, I heard someone say: Christians are not perfect, just forgiven. At one level that is true. But it also can be used to set the bar really low for how we need to live.

We don't see that placed beside people in the Bible do we. It's not: "Joseph— not a perfect man, just forgiven." It's "Joseph, a good and righteous man".

We should strive for the same reputation in Christ. We never say that about ourselves, but "a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Prov 22:1). Devoted disciples seek a good name to the glory of God!

2) Death Defeated (24:1-12)

- This is the last and final section in Luke. It ties the resurrection and ascension together.
- This is the package deal of redemption: death—resurrection—ascension.
- Notice this was early dawn of the first day of the week—the picture is a *new creation*.
- We need to remember that the women did not go to the tomb expecting Jesus to be risen. They went to anoint his body with spices—serves a similar purpose as embalming.
- Nicodemus had donated 100 roman pounds of spices to anoint Jesus (Jn 19:39). An unused tomb is also set apart for a King. Jesus's death was criminal, but his burial was kingly.

The takeaway is that Jesus deserves to be honored and respected simply for who he is. All the minor characters in the narrative simply live life to honor and respect the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what following Jesus looks like.

- When they arrive, the stone has been rolled back.

Someone once said that the symbol for Christianity should be an empty tomb, not a cross. Kind of hard to make Jewelry out of that though.

- The high point of this moment is the angel's words (5-6), "Why do you seek the living among the dead; he is not here, he is risen."
- Background to resurrection: Jews believed that the resurrection was a way of God's bringing justice to a world that severely lacks it. Resurrection is God's vindication of a person. If they face injustice on earth, God will have the last word through resurrection.

With this in mind, the resurrection first says something about Jesus: He is righteous. He is vindicated.

In that way, the resurrection confirms Jesus is the Son of God. (Rom 1:3-4) “(He) was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord”.

But there are also saving benefits we get from Jesus’s resurrection.

1. Justification (Rom 4:25)— “²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

- We tend to think justification mainly flows from the cross; with the death-resurrection picture of salvation, we are justified (vindicated) because Christ has been.
- The only people who will be vindicated before God are those who look in faith to Christ for it. Self-vindication is a vain hope before God.

2. Freedom from sin (1 Cor 15:17)— if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

3. Freedom from death (Rom 8:11) — hope of eternal life

“he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

The benefits are overwhelming!

A pastor friend once used this analogy. He said, if we advertised that our church was giving away free gold, how many people would cancel everything and line the doors. You would have people coming out - camping out to be the first in line.

The church has something radically more precious than gold—the church has the gospel.

Friends who are not Christians, nothing is more valuable than what Christ has done in his death and resurrection. It is far more valuable than all the gold on the earth.

Christian friends, what Christ has given us, nothing can compare to it. And no one can take it away: justification, freedom from sin and death.

Resurrection Responses:

1. Reverence (v5) “they were freighted and bowed their heads to the ground.”
 - The resurrection is a display of God’s power (Phil 3:10). It reminds us of how powerful God is, and how powerless we are.
 - If there is one thing that the contemporary church has lost, it is probably a sense of *reverence*—unless you are in Anglican or Liturgical tradition.
2. Trust in Christ’s Word (6b-8)
 - The resurrection was proof that Jesus was fully trustworthy.
 - A prophet needed to be 100 percent accurate (Dt 18:22).
 - Trust, though, does not come naturally (v11).
3. Marveling (12)
 - This has nothing to do with seeing the latest Avengers movie.
 - Marveling is to be awestruck, to be amazed, or astonished.

Conclusion

The most natural emotion of amazement is gladness. Amazed people are glad. They are so gripped by something that it makes them happy. Their cup runs over.

Friends, when we ponder the resurrection, is that where we are? Are we amazed, happy—is our gloom turned to gladness because Christ exited the grave?

A few summary points:

1. The resurrection changes everything. Jesus is vindicated. Jesus is trustworthy and true. If he was not raised, he would be a false prophet.
2. The resurrection is essential to the gospel. No resurrection means no gospel. You cannot be a Christian and doubt or deny the resurrection. It’s not icing on the cake, it’s the essential core of hope. (Rom 10:9).
Confess with your mouth and believe in your heart God raised Jesus from the dead.
3. The resurrection changes us. It justifies us, frees us from the power of sin and death. It causes us to marvel now and keeps us glad into eternity.