

“ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK”

**I. Introduction**

- A. One of the challenges that we face when we study the accounts of Christ’s resurrection is that we know how it all worked out.
1. We know that Jesus rose on the third day.
  2. And because of this, our senses tend to be dulled to the startling nature of what happened that day.
  3. We need to remember that Jesus’ followers were not at all prepared for what they were about to witness.
  4. They had been utterly devastated by the Lord’s crucifixion.
  5. They were overcome with grief and fear and shame.
  6. This man whom they had seen walk on water, and heal the sick, and teach with authority, and cast out demons, and even raise the dead -- he was gone.
  7. How could this have happened?
  8. How could Jesus, the One upon whom they had pinned all of their hopes, be dead?
- B. It is helpful to try to enter into the thoughts and feelings of Jesus’ followers as we consider this text.
1. By doing so, our hearts can begin to be filled with the same sense of wonder and joy that they experienced when they learned that Jesus had risen from the dead.

2. We should be utterly amazed and enthralled by what took place that day.
3. This is not merely something that happened way back then.
4. It is something that has profound ramifications believers in all times.
5. Jesus' resurrection is an unparalleled event, an event that changes everything.
6. It marks the beginning of a new world, a world without sin, without suffering, without sadness, without death.

## II. An Unexpected Encounter

- A. Luke's account of the resurrection begins with these words: "But on the first day of the week..."
  1. That phrase stands out because it immediately follows a paragraph in which there are two other references to the days on which these things were taking place.
  2. Luke told us in 23:54 that Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus' body in a tomb on "the day of Preparation," which was Friday.
  3. Then he said in 23:56 that the women who saw where the body of Jesus had been laid rested on the Sabbath day, which was Saturday in the Jewish reckoning.
  4. Those days of the week had great theological significance in that first century Jewish context.
  5. The day of Preparation was the day to complete your work and get ready so that you could set apart the Sabbath as the day of rest.
  6. The women followed that pattern.

7. They made their preparations and then they rested on the Sabbath.
  8. Jesus also followed this pattern.
  9. On Friday he finished the work for which he had been sent by dying on the cross, and on Saturday his body rested in the tomb.
- B. By telling us that the resurrection took place “on the first day of the week,” or Sunday, Luke is not merely relating the chronology of these events to us.
1. The first day also had theological significance in Judaism.
  2. It corresponds to the eighth day, and eight is the number of new beginnings in the Old Testament.
  3. Noah and his family were eight in number after the flood.
  4. Covenant children were circumcised on the eighth day.
  5. The temple was dedicated on the eighth day.
  6. The Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths all began one day after the seventh day, the eighth day, the first day of a new week.
  7. In light of this background, we can conclude that Luke’s mention of “the first day of the week” in his account of the resurrection has theological import.
  8. As one commentator puts it, “On the sixth day, Friday, the work of redemption is accomplished. On the seventh day, ‘they rested according to the commandment.’ But then ‘on the first day’ a new week began. It was the first day of a new era, a new creation. A whole new world was coming into being on that first Christian Sunday.” [Wilcock, 206]

9. That is what we are celebrating when we gather in covenant assembly each Lord's Day.
  10. We are celebrating the beginning of the eternal Sabbath rest of the new creation, the rest into which we begin to enter when we believe in Jesus Christ.
- C. Luke makes it clear that the women saw the place where Jesus was laid.
1. That fact rules out the possibility that the empty tomb could be explained by saying that the women went to the wrong tomb.
  2. They knew where they were going.
  3. They also knew why they were going there.
  4. They went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body with spices.
  5. They were not going there to be the first eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection.
  6. They were not expecting to find an empty tomb and a risen Savior.
- D. The kind of tomb in which Jesus had been laid was sealed by a large disk-like stone that was rolled into a cut-out groove in front of the entrance.
1. This stone was so large that it would take several men to roll it away from the entrance.
  2. Mark tells us that the women realized while they were on the way to the tomb that they did not have anyone to move the stone for them.
  3. Yet when they arrive at the tomb, they discover to their surprise that the stone has been rolled away.
  4. And when they go inside the tomb, they are met by two more surprises: Jesus' body is not there, and two men in dazzling

apparel are there.

5. The women's fearful response to this is a confirmation of what we are explicitly told by Matthew and John: these men are angelic beings.
6. As we have said, this is not at all what these women were expecting when they set out for Jesus' tomb early that Sunday morning.

### III. Remembering and Reporting

- A. The angels then address the women, asking them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"
  1. They announce Christ's resurrection and remind the women that Jesus told them that this is what was going to happen to him.
  2. As much as these women loved Jesus, they had not yet understood what he meant when he spoke of being raised on the third day.
  3. Perhaps they thought that he was speaking figuratively.
  4. But here at the tomb they see that his prediction has been fulfilled literally.
  5. As they begin to process what they are seeing and what they are being told, it is as if a lightbulb goes off in their heads.
  6. They remember Jesus' words.
  7. And now that they have his words in mind, their outlook is completely transformed.
  8. Now they can view the empty tomb through the lens of Jesus' teaching that he would be raised on the third day.
- B. The experience of these women illustrates the dullness of our weak minds.

1. Even when we regularly read the Bible and hear it preached every Lord's Day, we are quick to forget the words that our God has spoken.
  2. When troubling circumstances or thoughts arise, we panic, we grow distraught, we get frustrated.
  3. Whenever we find ourselves responding in those ways, we need to remember God's words in Scripture.
  4. This is why it is so helpful to commit portions of Scripture to memory.
  5. Storing verses away in our minds makes them more readily available to us.
  6. When we have the Word of God in mind amid the trials and challenges and worries of life, we are able to interpret these things through the lens of God's eternal truth.
- C. Once the women come to the realization of what had happened, they go to Jesus' disciples and report the news to them.
1. Notice that they do this in spite of the fact that what they are reporting seems so unbelievable, and in spite of the fact that the testimony of women was not taken very seriously in the first century.
  2. They are not worried about how they are going to come across.
  3. They are not concerned about how their report will be received.
  4. They simply go and announce what they have seen and heard, using the words that Jesus had spoken to make sense of it all.
  5. This is exactly what we are called to do as Christ's church.

6. We are not called to make the gospel more appealing or more believable to people.
  7. It is not our job to make people believe our message.
  8. Our task is simply to announce what God has said in his Word, trusting that he will grant faith to those whom he has chosen to save.
- D. The initial response to the women's report was underwhelming.
1. Luke tells us that the apostles rejected the report as an idle tale.
  2. Keep in mind that these were the men who would eventually give the foundational testimony upon which Christ would build his church.
  3. When these men first heard the women's report, they did not believe that Jesus was risen, even though Jesus had repeatedly told them that he would rise on the third day.
  4. Here is a reminder that true believers sometimes have difficulty believing the things that God says in his Word.
  5. Like the apostles, we are sometimes so caught up in our sadness, or anxiety, or frustration, or whatever else is consuming us that the truth of God seems like an idle tale.
  6. Whenever that happens, you need to take yourself in hand and preach the truth to yourself.
  7. Stop listening to your old sinful, doubting self.
  8. Speak God's Word to yourself instead.

#### IV. Seeing and Marveling

- A. We don't know what prompted Peter to go to the tomb and have a look for himself, but he did so, even though he did not believe the women's

report.

1. When he got there, he found the same thing that the women had found.
  2. The stone was rolled away and Jesus' body was not there.
  3. Luke also tells us that Peter saw the linen clothes in which Christ's body had been wrapped lying there in the tomb by themselves.
  4. This is a significant detail.
  5. The fact that Jesus' body was not in those linens is an important piece of evidence testifying to his resurrection.
  6. If the body had been removed by someone, they certainly would not have taken it out of the grave clothes.
- B. What do you think was going through Peter's heart and mind when he looked into that tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there without a body in them?
1. I would imagine that he experienced a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions at that moment.
  2. It is likely that one of the first things that he would have thought of was Jesus teaching about how he would be put to death and then rise on the third day.
  3. Like the women, Peter did not at first understand what Jesus meant when he said that.
  4. Those words were cloaked in mystery for Peter.
  5. But now that he is confronted by the reality of the empty tomb, the realization slowly dawns on him that Jesus' predictions were not really all that mysterious after all.



6. Jesus really meant that he would emerge victorious from the grave.
- C. As Peter made his way back from the tomb, hope was born anew in his heart.
1. His faith had been shaken by the cross.
  2. As Jesus had foretold, Satan had sifted Peter like wheat.
  3. But Jesus' intercession on Peter's behalf ensured that his faith did not fail.
  4. And as Peter reflected on the amazing things that had happened, all that he could do was marvel at the inscrutable nature of God's ways.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Decades after that first Easter Sunday, when Peter penned his first epistle, he began it by praising God for causing "us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. 1:3)
- B. If you are a Christian, you have this living hope.
- C. Your hope does not reside in technology, or in the economy, or in modern medicine or alternative medicine, or in your accomplishments and possessions, or in your human relationships, or in your feelings, or anything else that belongs to this world.
- D. Your hope rests upon the fact that you belong to the One who has conquered death.
- E. To take refuge in him is to know that there is nothing in this world that can bring you any ultimate harm.
- F. Consider these concluding thoughts from J. Gresham Machen:

"In Christ, all things are ours. There is now no awful beyond of mystery and fear. We cannot explain the world. But we rejoice now that we cannot

explain it. To us it is all unknown. But it contains no mysteries for our Saviour. He is on the throne. He is at the centre. He is ground and explanation of all things. He pervades the remotest bounds. In Him all things consist. The world is full of dread, mysterious powers. They touch us already in a thousand woes. But from all of them we are safe." [*God Transcendent*, 85]