

## **He Is Not Here: The Story of Easter**

*Luke 24:1-12*

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to Luke 24 for this message entitled, “He Is Not Here: The Story of Easter.” Our text for today is Luke 24:1-12 and in this passage we find the extraordinary account of the events surrounding Jesus’ resurrection. Surprisingly, the Scripture says next to nothing about the resurrection itself. Its focus is actually on how Jesus’ most loyal followers had to be convinced that Jesus rose from the dead.

Follow along as I read Luke 24:1-12. . . .

The resurrection of Jesus is the hinge on which the history of the world turns. Throughout history there have been many world-shaping events and men and women who have changed the course history, of course. Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington, among many others, can rightly be argued to have influenced the shape of the world. The rise and fall of the empires through regional and global wars sculpted the landscape and a great many cultural dynamics of humanity.

Copernicus, Galileo, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, and Ada Lovelace are just a few of the scientists who accelerated our scientific knowledge and technology. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Lock, Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche are philosophers who have shaped how humanity thinks about reality and morality and truth.

Individually and collectively these events and men and women, and the people around them, have altered the borders of nations, shaped cultures, expanded our understanding of the universe, advanced our technology, and challenged humanity to answer the great questions of life.

But in the end, each individual found their home in the grave. I recently sat with a dying man. And though it was him and not me standing at the precipice of eternity, for a moment I sensed the vanity that Solomon describes in the book of Ecclesiastes. “Vanity of vanities,” Solomon says, “All is vanity.” Death is the great equalizer and it is what reveals the true significance of things.

No matter who stands at the top of the heap of humanity, whether we ride a horse or drive a car, no matter what music we enjoy or our political leanings, whether we’re simple minded or able to ponder the mysteries of life—none of that changes the fact that the end of the day, we all die. Whether we’ve lived for five minutes or 50 years or 100 years, no matter our experience of life, it all comes to an end. And at the moment of death every person realizes just how pointless so much of our daily concerns are.

With all their great contributions, all the great people of history have done nothing to change that fact. Except Jesus. Jesus stands alone as the one who has dealt with humanity’s greatest problem—death. And flowing from his life, death, and resurrection have come not only world shaping events, but also endless implications for your daily life and mine.

This may sound like an exaggeration, but it is not: if Jesus rose from the dead, that one fact should change your entire life, from now to eternity. My aim in this message is to walk through this account of the resurrection of Jesus and then draw out for you some of the most significant implications for your life and mine.

We’ll step through his remarkable account under these four headings: 1) The Unexpected Empty Tomb; 2) The Unremembered Promise; 3) The Unbelieving Disciples; and 4) The Undaunted Hope. Let’s begin with the unexpected empty tomb.

### **The Unexpected Empty Tomb (v. 1-3)**

Before we get into the text, we need to backup just a bit. LOOK at 23:44 which takes us to the end of Jesus' life as he hangs on the cross. . . . [44-49]

Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, met the same end that comes to us all. He whose coming was foretold millennia ago, whose life was described centuries before, whose birth was proclaimed by angels, and whose identity was validated by undeniable miracles—he was despised and rejected and put to death.

As is the case for all people, everything he had done, the trajectory of his life, the hope for the future—all of it came to a screeching halt. Or so it seemed.

It certainly seemed that way to the women and to the disciples. This passage and the other Gospels make it clear that once Jesus hung dead on the cross and was buried, their expectation was that his body would eventually return to dust as happens to the rest of us. They did not believe that he would rise from the dead. How do we know that?

LOOK at 24:1-3. . . .

This is now the first day of the week, what we call Sunday. In the last section of ch. 23, we learn that after Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, one of the Jewish leaders who did not agree with the decision to put Jesus to death, he asked Pilate if he could bury Jesus. Working with Nicodemus—another dissenting Jewish leader as John's Gospel tells us—Joseph places the body of Jesus in a fresh tomb not far from where Jesus was crucified.

23:55 tells us that the women who followed and supported Jesus throughout his ministry made sure they knew where Jesus was buried. They then returned to their homes to prepare more spices and ointment which they intended to apply to the linen-wrapped corpse of Jesus to overcome the stench of decay of Jesus' body. This is the first indication that they did not believe that Jesus would rise from the dead.

By this first day of the week, Jesus has been dead and buried for three days. As the day begins to dawn they make their way through the city, out the gate and over to the tomb which was in the midst of a garden. With them they carried the spices and ointment they had prepared. That's significant.

Think about it: They did not come with a fresh garment they expected to give to the risen Christ. They did not come with streamers they expected to use as they danced and celebrated his resurrection. They came with spices and ointment because they expected to find a corpse that was starting to decompose.

The Jews did not embalm bodies, but they did wrap them with an extraordinary amount of powerfully fragrant oils to overcome the formidable odor a body puts off as it decomposes. That's what these women were intending to do.

In the Gospel of Mark, we learn that as they were making their way to the tomb with hands full of heavy bundles, they discussed among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" The round stone used to cover the tomb entrance would have weighed hundreds of pounds, and it would have sat in a dip in front of the entrance making it all the more difficult to move.

Perhaps in their grief as they were preparing the spices, they forgot about the stone and only realized the problem as they made their way to the tomb. Whatever the case, the only option the women had at this point was to wait until they got there to see if anyone was around. And if you're wondering why they didn't think the soldiers guarding the tomb could help, it's because the women did not know about them. They were put in place the day after the burial.

So the women get to the tomb and to their shock, vs. 2 says that they found the stone rolled away. The Gospel of Matthew says that there was an earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone and sent the soldiers guarding the tomb running in a panic. How far the earthquake was felt, we don't know, but it seems the women showed up just minutes after the soldiers had fled. Not knowing that there had been soldiers, and not knowing how the stone was rolled away, whether they were

relieved or confused or worried by that, we don't know, but vs. 3 says they go in and they don't find the body of Jesus.

Now keep in mind, they saw Jesus buried, then they kept the Sabbath, and now it is very early in the morning—early dawn, vs. 1 tells us. They didn't come later in the day when others could have gotten there first. No, they were there at first light. So when you know you're the first to arrive and you see the stone rolled away and you don't find the body in the tomb, and you're not expecting a resurrection, do you know what is the appropriate response? Confusion.

Vs. 4 says they are perplexed about this. They are at a loss of how to interpret these facts. They are uncertain of how to respond. Again, this tells us that they were not expecting a resurrection. More than that, it tells us that even though they weren't expecting a resurrection, the facts didn't even raise the possibility in their minds!

### **The Unremembered Promise (vs. 4-8)**

That brings us to the unremembered promise. LOOK at vs. 4-8. . . .

These women who loved Jesus and supported his ministry and heard him teach the crowds and they often overheard his private discussions with the 12 disciples—they were not coming up with the possibility that Jesus had risen from the dead. So God sends two angels—these men in dazzling apparel as they're described here—to jog their memories.

On top of the shock of the stone rolled away and the shock of the empty tomb, now the women are shocked by two men whose clothes are lighting up the inside of the tomb.

Dazzling apparel is clothing that was gleaming, flashing. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is Luke 17:24 where it says, "For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in

his day.” Lightning and flashes are the same root word—lightning is the noun and flashes is the verb. So these two men standing inside the relatively small space of a tomb are wearing clothing pulsating with flashes of light.

It's no wonder that the women went from perplexed to frightened. They had gotten up and ready while it was dark, they walked to the tomb at early dawn, and then entered the darkness of the tomb. All of a sudden it was lit up as though the sun itself was inside the tomb. They were terrified at the sight of these two men and looked down to shield their eyes from the light.

But then they hear these beautiful words. LOOK at vs. 5-6, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” As those words entered their ears you can imagine the thoughts that flashed through their minds, “Seek the living? What does that mean? Is Jesus alive? Yes—he is risen! But how?” And then the angel continues, vs. 6-7, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

This is the unremembered promise made by Jesus himself. That he would die, be buried, and rise on the third day should not have been a surprise because Jesus had told them it would happen. In fact, not just once, but multiple times.

Back in Luke 9, Jesus and his followers were in Galilee and he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” And the disciples gave various answers, all of which were wrong opinions of who Jesus is. Then he asked, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter says, “The Christ of God.” Peter rightly declares that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God. And here's Jesus' response, “And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’”

A week later, Jesus healed a demon-possessed boy and Luke 9 says, “And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he

was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.’” Jesus wanted his disciples to know that despite his majestic glory on display and people’s response to it, he would be rejected.

A few chapters later Jesus again hints of what is to come. He says in 13:33, “Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.” He knew the Jewish leaders desired to put him to death and he ensured they could not do it before the time was right. But then as he was passing through Galilee and Samaria, he tells them again in 18:31, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”

If Jesus had repeatedly and clearly told them in advance that he would be flogged and killed and rise again, why didn’t the disciples and the women expect that to happen? Luke 18 tells us. After Jesus made that promise, it says, “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” As it true for most of us, they didn’t remember what they didn’t understand. Mysterious as it is to us, it was God’s design that they not understand what Jesus said.

You know what I find most surprising about this unremembered promise? Not everyone forgot. Though the women and the disciples didn’t understand or remember what Jesus said, his enemies did. Luke doesn’t tell us this, but Matthew does. He tells us in chapter 27 that the morning after Jesus was buried, the chief priests and the Pharisees came to Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.”

The Jewish leaders not only remembered that Jesus said he would be killed and rise again, they also assumed that the disciples would try to deceive the nation by making it look like he did! So they took action and set a guard. Their fear was unwarranted, because Jesus' own followers didn't remember and didn't expect Jesus to rise. But their fear was also misplaced, because Jesus did rise from the grave and no one could stop it.

But now here are the women standing in the empty tomb. The angels not only tell them that Jesus is alive, but they remind them that Jesus had told them this would happen, and so vs. 8 says, "And they remembered his words." Oh it all came back to them like a rush of wind and now it all made sense. One moment they were perplexed, now they perceive; one moment they were confused, now they comprehend; one moment they were terrified, now they are thrilled.

This is what happens when we remember the promises of God—when we find ourselves in the dark night of the soul, remembering the promises of God causes the light to dawn in our hearts and in the light of God's promises everything changes.

I don't know what's worse—that the disciples and the women didn't remember that Jesus promised that he would rise from the dead, or what happens next.

### **The Unbelieving Disciples (v. 9-11)**

LOOK at vs. 9-11 to see the unbelieving disciples. . . .

So the women rush out of the tomb and head back to where the disciples are. Remember that this is still early in the morning, so the implication is that Jesus' disciples and those who followed along with them were all together in one place. Most of Jesus' disciples and these women were from the region of Galilee. None of them lived in Jerusalem, which is why after the Lord had his final meal a few nights before, they went out to the Mount of Olives.



They had all come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and because the city would swell beyond its capacity at Passover, many people camped out on the surrounding hills. Jesus and his disciples tended to stay on the Mount of Olives which was across the Kidron Valley on the opposite side of the city from where Jesus was crucified and buried.

So it would have taken at least 20 minutes of briskly walking through the city, going down the Kidron Valley, and up Mount of Olives to where the disciples were. And if the women were still carrying the now useless spices and ointment, they would have been quite out of breath by the time they got to the disciples.

But they get there and you can imagine what happens when you have more than four women all excited about what they've just experienced. As one talks the others catch their breath, and when she takes a breath another one jumps in to explain what they saw and heard to the disciples. And back and forth they go.

For their part, the disciples are taken aback by the women returning so soon. They're trying to understand what is being said with all the interruptions, trying to piece it all together. *Wait, how did you move the stone? Where was Jesus? You saw angels? They said what?*

To their shame, the disciples were predisposed by cultural norms to not believe the women. In the first century Jewish culture, women were so degraded that they could not testify in court. There may have been other reasons, but the oral tradition of the Jews twisted the Mosaic Law requirement that two or three witnesses were needed to establish a fact to mean that it had to be two men. So even though here you have four, five, or more women all testifying to the same experience of what they saw and heard, they rejected it.

Now think about this. In addition to describing what they saw, they repeated the angelic reminder that Jesus had promised repeatedly that he would be killed and that he would rise on the third day. Even that had no effect on the disciples. There

were no epiphanies; no memories were triggered; and there was no belief. Worse than that, they thought these women were crazy.

Notice what it says there in vs. 11: “these words seemed to them an idle tale.” The Greek word translated as “idle tale” is only found here in the New Testament and it’s a rare word in ancient Greek literature. But was used to describe someone who experience fever-produced delirium, or someone who ranted a raved. One use is that it referred to the mythological tales of paganism. Whatever nuance we want to apply to the disciples, they thought these women were speaking nonsense, they were being irrational.

It's as though the disciples thought, “I don’t know what happened—they were grieving when they left this morning, but they seemed to have worked themselves up into an emotional frenzy.” To the disciples, a resurrection was hope beyond hope. Sure, Jesus raised people from the dead, but a dead men can’t raise himself, they must have thought to themselves. Jesus raised a little girl soon after she died. He raised a young man during the funeral, and he raised Lazarus days after he was placed in the tomb. But who was there to raise Jesus from the dead?

They simply did not believe. This is yet another proof that the resurrection is true. All four Gospels emphasize how unexpected it was that Jesus rose from the dead. His closest disciples were not expecting it, the rest of his followers weren’t expecting it, and when they heard about it, they didn’t believe it.

Perhaps you’re sitting there and you don’t believe it. After all, this was 2,000 years ago we’re talking about. How can you know if Jesus rose from the dead? How are you supposed to believe something from so long ago? If you’re wondering that yourself, my first question is this: what evidence would you accept? If I could prove to you through all the commonly recognized means of confirming historical facts, would you believe it? That’s been done by a multitude of scholars and investigators over the years and centuries and millennia.

Perhaps you don't believe it because you're not sure you can trust the Bible. After all, it was written by men. To that I would ask if you believe anything at all about ancient history—or modern history for that matter. Last I checked, all books were written by people.

Many people have set out to reject the Bible as a reliable source of historical knowledge. And in the process of trying to prove it false, they came face-to-face with the fact that its historical accuracy is undeniable. So reliable is the Bible that, when compared to any other writing of ancient history, the evidence is exponentially better for the Bible than other ancient writings that if you refuse to believe the Bible, to have intellectual integrity would you have to release any claim to know anything at all about ancient times.

The disciples were discouraged, disappointed, and disenchanted. They thought Jesus was the Messiah, but when he died, everything they thought to be true came crashing down. Or so they thought. They refused—at least initially—to accept the evidence for the resurrection as told by multiple witnesses. After Jesus appeared to them later that night and they finally believed, Jesus said, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

My friend you may not have been there, but that is no reason to remain in unbelief. You can't personally verify almost anything that you believe to be true. All the evidence is available to you to rationally believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Don't be like his disciples who rejected the truth despite the evidence and testimony. Be more like Peter. Though he may not have believed the women, he decided he needed to check it out for himself.

We've looked at the unexpected empty tomb, the unremembered promise, and the unbelieving disciples. Let's consider the undaunted hope.

**The Undaunted Hope (v. 12)**

LOOK at vs. 12. . . .

Though Luke only tells us that Peter got up and took off, the Gospel of John tells us that John also went with him. They had an undaunted hope that perhaps, just maybe, the women weren't crazy after all. Maybe Jesus had risen from the dead. They had to check to make sure.

How Peter knew where the tomb was we're not sure. Either he and John were with the women when they saw where Jesus was buried, or perhaps the women told them where it was. Either way they ran. They didn't meander over there, they didn't briskly make their way there. No, they gathered up their tunic and ran down the hill, up the hill, through Jerusalem, out the other side, and down to where the tomb was in the garden.

By now the sun was coming up the horizon, the city was awake, and the streets were getting full as many people were preparing to head back to their homes in Galilee and other areas after the Passover. So Peter would have had a harder time getting to the tomb than the women had. But he gets there and he stoops to enter through the small opening to look at the place where the body should be.

And lo and behold, no body. Notice what vs. 12 says that he saw, "he saw the linen cloths by themselves." These cloths were used to wrap the body of Jesus. The presence of the cloths are strong evidence of the resurrection. If someone had stolen the body, they would not have unwrapped him first. There would be no reason to. But if the power of God rose Jesus from the dead, it would also have needed to remove the cloths so Jesus could get up and move. And for God who can give life to the dead and bring anything into existence with a word, it was no trouble at all to supply Jesus with a new garment.

No angels appeared to Peter and John. They were not given special revelation—at least not yet. They were given eye-witness testimony by the women, and they were given the evidence of the empty tomb with the burial cloths left behind.

All Luke tells us as to how they responded is there at the end of vs. 12, “and he went home marveling at what had happened.” There’s a grammatical issue there. It literally reads, “he went away to himself marveling.” The phrase “to himself” is considered by some to be an idiom referring to going home. But that’s unlikely, unless by “home” Luke means going back to where the rest of the disciples were staying. Peter’s home is in Capernaum, at least a two-day journey, and yet he is with the rest of the disciples later this evening.

“he went away to himself” could also mean that rather than going back to the rest of the group right away, Peter went off to be by himself for a while, which is entirely understandable and most likely the case. And lastly, the words “to himself” could be applied to the second verb, meaning that he marveled to himself. That would mean that he did a lot of internal processing of what this all meant.

Peter set a record for how fast one can get from the Mount of Olives to the other side and out of the city, but then he took his time getting back, being lost in his thoughts, marveling, wondering, being amazed. It’s hard to grasp the emotional change he and the women went through. They went from those initial days of overwhelming grief and sorrow, to shock and surprise, and now to marveling—*What happened? What does this mean? Will we see him again?*

They didn’t have to wait long. Luke goes on to tell us that Jesus appears to two other disciples later that day, and then at the end of the day he appeared to the rest of the disciples and others who were gathered together talking about these things.

There’s more that happened that morning, and the other Gospels fill in some of the gaps that Luke chooses to leave out. But he gives us enough of the events for us to know that his followers were not expecting the resurrection and therefore it cannot be said that the resurrection was something they planned and manipulated. They had to be convinced and they finally were convinced when they saw Jesus that night. And once convinced, their lives changed forever.

## **Implications**

What does this all mean for you, 2,000 years after this remarkable day? Having walked through this account, I want to spend just a few minutes highlighting some of the most significant implications for our lives.

First, because Jesus rose from the dead, we must believe in him. Many religious leaders have come onto the scene throughout the history of the world. They have all claimed to tell you truth about the unseen realm—things that could never be known unless God revealed them. There have been many self-proclaimed messiahs who claimed to be sent by God.

But they all failed the ultimate test—the one God himself set forth in the Old Testament of what his Messiah would do—and that test is this: overcome death. Once a person died, there was no way to know if what they had said in life was true. Jesus stands alone as one who taught truth from God, claimed to be the Messiah, and then was raised from the dead to prove it. So we must believe in him.

Second, because Jesus rose from the dead, we must embrace everything Jesus said. The Old Testament sets a high bar for believing a someone who claims to be from God: Do their predictions come true? If they don't, put them to death. If they do, believe them. Jesus made many claims and taught many things throughout his ministry. But there was no claim more audacious than that he would rise from the dead after three days in the grave.

And yet, Jesus was raised from the dead by God on the third day. God would not fulfill the claim of a false prophet. So the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead means that he is a true prophet and therefore we must believe everything else he said.

Third, because Jesus rose from the dead, we must submit to him. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, which is to claim to be the sovereign ruler of the world. Jesus said after his resurrection and right before he ascended into heaven, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The one who has all authority must be obeyed. Jesus didn't come to simply take away the consequence of our sin—everlasting death—no he came deliver us from the power of sin so that we would live as God designed us to live and as Jesus taught to live.

Fourth, because Jesus rose from the dead, every day we must remember that this life is temporary, but eternity is forever. This life is not all there is—Jesus proved that. Forty days after he rose from the dead he ascended into heaven from which he promised to return one day to take his people to himself. For those who believe in Christ, when your eyes close in death, they will open in everlasting life. We need not fear death and we can persevere through suffering.

And though there are so many more implications, I'll conclude with a fifth one. Because Jesus rose from the dead, not only must we believe in Jesus, believe everything he said, submit to him, and live in light of eternity, we must—we absolutely must—tell others about Jesus.

After declaring that all authority has been given to him Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” To make disciples is to tell others about Jesus so that they too would believe in him and submit to him and follow him.

Titus 2:14 says, “[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” And there is no greater work than speaking and proclaiming the gospel—the good news that forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God and everlasting life is available to all who believe in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have not believed, believe in Jesus today! If you have believed, believe in him afresh today! And may we all live in light of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Was there anything in the message that ministered to your soul?
2. Were there any questions you had from the message or passage?
3. What were the emotions felt by the women and disciples throughout the passage? And what caused them?
4. How did the disciples respond to the news of the resurrection?
5. Why is the resurrection of Christ so important for Christians to embrace? (See 1 Corinthians 15:12-23)
6. What should be our response to the resurrection?
7. How could it affect our daily life? (See Romans 6:4)