

Great News from the Graveyard

Luke 24:1-12

Pastor Tim Nixon

A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile. "Bill" and his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car.

On the eve of his graduation, his father handed him a gift wrapped Bible. Bill was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house.

He and his father never saw each other again. It was the news of his father's death that brought Bill home again.

As he sat one night going through his father's possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him.

He brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier's check, dated the day of his graduation - in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together.

As I thought about this story, I couldn't help but wonder how many people in this world have done the same thing to God. Literally tossed aside a wonderful promise, because they didn't understand it, or they didn't believe that it was possible.

In our world, we are taught that; "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

So many of us have been taken in by "empty promises," that we are leery of anything or anyone that tells us we can have something for nothing.

THE WORLD SIMPLY DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY!

But, you know what – God does – God never made a promise that was too good to be true.

The truth of the matter is, the world is full of empty promises. We watch TV, and the advertisements tell us that we can be happy, sexy, rich, or famous, if we only purchase a certain product. It doesn't take long before we have been fooled enough to know that the world's promises are full of emptiness.

But, God is different. Instead of promises full of emptiness, on Resurrection Sunday, he gave us emptiness that is full of promise.

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

As you can see the focus of our text is on remembering the words and promises of Jesus.

The stage is set prior to verse one. Jesus has been crucified and buried, but the scene opens there. Picture it in your mind's eye. The sun is breaking over the eastern horizon. A few of Jesus' followers – women – are on their way to a tomb. It is the tomb where Jesus was buried. The women understood what had happened. Mark chapter 23 explains that, "The women who had

come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” They saw the death of Christ. They saw Him die.

Remember, they put Jesus in the grave on Friday. They went home. They had a few hours, perhaps, or maybe an hour left that evening, before Sabbath begins at six, or a little after, and they went back and prepared spices, because they couldn’t do it on the Sabbath

They did it, and they were ready now to bring those spices back on Sunday, when the Sabbath was over, early in the morning, and anoint the body of Jesus as an expression of their love for him.

The conversation must have been solemn. The task before them is a sad one. They are going to anoint the body of Jesus.

As they come to the top of a rise in the path, they all stop. Still and quiet, they stare off in the distance. As you look with them, off to the right, just outside the city stands a gruesome reminder of the events that recently occurred. Do you see it? Over there, silhouetted by the glow of the morning sky, on top of the hill the locals call, “The Skull.” 3 cross pieces.

Yesterday was the Sabbath, so nobody had yet removed them. So, there they stand, an empty reminder of the horror of Friday. The one in the middle, that is the one that Jesus hung on. Take a close look at it. Look up at the top – those bloodstains are from the crown of thorns that was crushed into Jesus’ skull. The stains on the ends of the crossbar – they came from the nails that were driven into his hands. The main beam – it was soaked in blood – blood from his back – blood that was bled when the Roman soldiers beat him.

We see it everywhere, necklaces, musicians wear them, they are tattoos, and on t-shirts. – the cross. In the life of the unbeliever it is simply a symbol. Unfortunately in the lives of many Christians it is no different. The cross has no power, it is just a decoration.

Christians don’t understand it. The cross is a symbol of death. We don’t wear jewelry shaped like an electric chair. No – we do not understand the power of the cross.

We are wretched, pitiful, naked, and blind and we do not even know it. We simply think we are OK. But the cross says something different. We are not OK. Could it be that we have hung a cross on our lifestyle to try and make everything we do seem alright, rather than allowing the power of the cross to transform us?

The power and promise of the empty cross is that you and I stand forgiven. Because it was on that cross that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Because of the work that Jesus did on that cross, you and I can now stand forgiven.” The first “empty promise” we see today is the empty cross – filled with the promise of forgiven sins.

And so, our women continue on the path and then they find our second empty promise in verses 2 to 8. The empty tomb.

Two men give the message. It is interesting that Luke highlights that there were two men. Two witnesses are the minimum number for validation according to Deuteronomy 17:6. Luke understands that these are angels based on the account in verse 23. Additional evidence is in verse five where Luke tells us that not only were the women afraid, but in their fear they bowed down to the ground. The response of fear in the presence of supernatural visitation occurs elsewhere in Luke as well.

Jesus had risen – he was alive – the tomb was empty. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 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.”

The question, “why do you seek the living among the dead?” was heart revealing. Why did the women come, and later why did Peter come running to the tomb? They were seeking the dead among the dead; they were not seeking the living. They did not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ would come back from the dead.

But the women remembered the words of Jesus when they were reminded of them. We are sometimes like that. We hear something, and almost know it to be true, but do not believe it. This is the way a lot of people treat the Word of God today. We read what we say we believe, but are functional atheists in the living out of it.

And what a tremendous promise that holds. For, in the fact of the empty tomb is the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise to every one of us that we too can be raised to eternal life.

Third

There is a final promise that we don't always notice when we read this story. It is the promise of the empty burial clothes.

The women, they immediately went back to the Apostles and reported what had happened. Verse 11 states that most of them did not believe. One commentator writes, “These words appeared to them” – meaning the apostles – “as nonsense.” That's what they thought of a resurrection; folly, idle talk, *lēros* is the Greek word, an empty tale, some kind of fable.

What is wrong with these women? And they're all saying the same thing. And no matter that all their stories are identical, and they all had the same experience, and it was fresh – it wasn't like there were all kinds of weeks in between where they were trying to put it together again – and they all say the same thing. It didn't matter. It didn't matter that their story had cohesion, that it had consistency. It didn't matter that they gave details that had no other explanation. They thought the whole thing was absolute nonsense, and they would not believe them.”¹

Isn't it interesting that the first unbelievers of the resurrection of Jesus were the apostles themselves? Yet our Lord had told them over and over what was going to happen concerning his

¹ John Macarthur on Luke 24.

death and resurrection.

Peter (and other accounts tell us John as well) immediately raced back to the tomb to see for himself. When he got there, Peter ran right in. It didn't take him long to discover that the tomb was just the way the women had said it was, empty. But, that's not all.

Inside, Peter found the clothes that Jesus had been buried in. They too were empty. This could only mean one thing – Jesus was alive! If someone had stolen his body, they wouldn't have removed the burial clothes and folded them up neatly and left them where they lay. A final empty promise that Jesus was alive!

It wouldn't be long, before Jesus, himself would appear to Mary Magdalene, and to all of the Apostles, and eventually to over 500 people. He would sit down with them, walk with them, talk with them, and eat with them.

The cross couldn't hold him, the tomb couldn't contain him, the burial clothes were unnecessary, because Jesus is alive! He has skin and bones and a face and was recognizable. And he talked and touched and loved and healed.

Off in the distance stood an empty cross, the promise that sins are forgiven. There is an empty tomb, the promise of eternal life to those who believe. Inside the tomb were empty burial clothes. The promise that, even we, can have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our living Savior.

It is the power of God and the power of Jesus shown in the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is not the conclusion to the story. It is not the end of the life of Christ. It is the goal of his life, the objective, and the purpose of his life. Listen to the importance of the resurrection in the language of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain."

We read these accounts year after year and many, if not most, of us are unaffected. Why?

Maybe it is because we rely so heavily on emotional responses rather than truth in our lives. But I think it because of two things:

1. We do not see the true power of Jesus.
2. And because we do not, we think too highly of ourselves and not enough of Jesus

Too many, when they hear the name of Jesus think of some little, timid, gentle man. We paint such a weak picture of Jesus in our minds. The painting of Jesus that comes to mind has his long blondish-brown hair and he is petting sheep.

We want to show this compassionate side of Jesus. And absolutely, yes, Jesus is compassionate. Did he pet sheep? Maybe.

I read all the gospels this week and found no sheep-petting.

But there is another side of Jesus that we don't talk about too often. But Jesus talked about it all of the time. And that is his power and his authority.

Most of the time when Jesus talks about himself, He talks about his power.

The truth is, the resurrection is the time when we celebrate Jesus power.

In Revelation 1 Jesus says “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

That’s what we celebrate this morning, a Jesus of power. If we see Jesus as weak, it causes us to be weak as his followers. We are speaking this morning of the God of all creation! We sing about it, but do we really believe it?

As we sang these songs this morning I couldn't help but pay close attention to the words. And as I did, I realized again how great God is. And how much I am in love with the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Do you want to see the power of the cross and the resurrection? I will take you there, but you must know that it is a dark and sorrowful place.

Listen as I read from Matthew 27:27-31.

This is the power of the cross and the resurrection. It is the power that did not come down and obliterate the evil men who did this to the Son of God.

It is the power of Jesus’ response to all this, “Father forgive them.”

Sometimes we want to make the gospel so easy for our friends and family to understand. We want to paint the picture of Jesus petting sheep so that people will find Jesus attractive. We make promises to people that God never makes.

- Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life
- Jesus will take that addiction away
- Jesus will take care of all your marriage problems.

But we must remember how Jesus talked about following him in Luke 14:6-27. The one who came with all power and authority, yet to die and be raised again. The one who is truly God and worthy of all worship.

The one of whom we read about this morning, said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

If Jesus were standing here this morning, reading the account of his resurrection, I think his offer of discipleship would probably include that text.

Do you hate your father or your wife or your kids? If you don't, don't bother. Jesus says there are

a bunch of crosses outside that door and I'm going to ask you to pick one up and carry it up a hill and die with me.

And part of me wants to stand up here and apologize to you for what Jesus said. He obviously doesn't know your kids. He doesn't know how cute they are. He obviously hasn't read your bumper sticker to know you have honor students.

He can't be talking about your wife, or your husband. They are important. He can't be talking about you. He didn't mean that.

Jesus said what he said

As we begun to wrap up this morning, let me tell you the truth about God. God thinks he is so great, that you should look at him and say:

- Wait, I can be forgiven by you?
- I can talk to you God?
- I can be loved, loved by you God?
- Jesus died on the cross to take away sins?
- Jesus you were raised from the grave to make eternal life possible for me? A little peon like me.

Where do I sign up?

A lot of us don't dwell on the power and greatness of Jesus, so we live in fear.

- We have lost our awe of the resurrection, so we live our lives in shame.
- We do not understand his sovereignty and providential goodness for us, so we fear the future.
- We fear other people, but it's all because we don't truly comprehend the power of Jesus Christ.

I have nothing to fear because He is Risen.

Can you say the same today?

I believe that it is John Maxwell who tells a story about a blazer that he bought from Nordstrom's.

“About a year and a half ago, I bought a new navy blazer at Nordstrom. It was one of those cases you may have gone through where you buy an item of clothing and the more you wear it, the more you realize you don't like it. My blazer wasn't the right color, and to make matters worse, it attracted lint like it was going out of style. After wearing it pretty regularly for six months or so, I stuck it in my closet and didn't wear it for a long time.

Tucked away in the back of my mind all the while was that famous Nordstrom unconditional-return policy. I thought, I've had this thing for a year and a half. I've worn it lots of times, and there's just no way they're going to take it back. About two weeks ago I decided I had nothing to

lose. I pulled the blazer out, threw a lot of lint on it to make it look bad, and took it down to Nordstrom's men's department. I walked in, and immediately I felt nervous. I felt like I was about to pull a scam of some sort, but I played it straight. I walked right up to the first salesman I saw and gave this little prepared speech. I said, "I am about to put your famous unconditional-return policy to its ultimate test. I have here a blazer. I've worn it lots. I've had it for a year and a half. I don't like it. It's the wrong color, and it attracts lint like it's going out of style. But I want to return this blazer for another blazer that I like." Then I stood there.

I couldn't believe it. This guy with a big handlebar mustache just looked at me and shook his head. He said, "For heaven's sake, what took you so long? Let's go find you a blazer." Ten minutes later I walked out with another blazer that was marked seventy-five dollars more than I paid for the one that I brought in. It was perfect for me. Didn't cost me a penny."

In a small way, the Nordstrom Department Store is a little like God. They are willing to back up their promises.

I think the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, more than any other time of the year, we realize that God has made amazing promises. So amazing, that some of you cannot bring yourselves to believe. Or, can you?

This morning, we have heard about three promises that God has made to us; the promise of forgiven sins; the promise of eternal life; and the promise of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

My question to you this morning is this; will you take him at his word?

If so, here is a final promise found in Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

This morning, there are two groups of people here. Some of you have never accepted God's promises for your life. You are not yet a part of all these promises. But you can be, find someone after the service wearing a lanyard and ask how.

The other group here claim to be Christians, but you are living in fear and confusion. The power of the resurrection is available to transform you as well.

Jesus is waiting, probably wondering, "For heaven's sake, what is taking you so long?"