

**INTRO:** Our sermon text this morning is Luke 24:1-12, the resurrection of Jesus. Of course, modern man finds miracles unbelievable. Thomas Jefferson is famous for cutting out of his Bible all the passages that refer to miracles and resurrection. But that, of course, is right where naturalism leads us. Naturalism is a positive sounding word for a negative worldview. Naturalism says that nature is all there is. It insists that there is no supernatural, no transcendent creator. The watch ticks, but no one made it. Naturalism is the worldview that drives modern science, and it is just as dogmatic as any theology, no matter how much it may protest otherwise. After all, the great pursuit of modern science today is to discover some natural explanation for all observable phenomena and so eliminate the need for the supernatural, assassinating God and exalting modern man as the new king of the universe. Naturalism is the ladder that humanity has climbed to reason itself up to the throne of the universe. It is the new orthodoxy. In documenting the secularization of the American University, George Marsden has written that

“Scientific viewpoints [became] the basis for finding the highest good in society and orthodoxy [became] that freedom from preconceptions was essential to the scientific method. In light of such beliefs, traditional religious viewpoints would be like grandparents in an upwardly mobile family, tolerated and sometimes respected because of their service in the past, even given some nice quarters of their own and respected on holidays, but otherwise expected either to be supportive or to stay out of the way and not say anything embarrassing” (G. Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, 312).

But are we really living in the first few centuries when the truth of Jesus’ resurrection is hard to swallow? According to the Bible, belief in miracles, and especially in Jesus’ resurrection, has always been hard for humanity to swallow, not because we’ve all been modern, or naturalists, but because we’ve all been sinners. We’ve all been trying to make sense of the world with our own unaided reason. We’ll discover this morning that even in the ears of Jesus’ original disciples ó the apostles themselves! ó the news of Jesus’ resurrection seemed like nonsense. And it will always seem like nonsense to us, as long as we insist on making sense of this world with our own sinful sense. The point that Luke 24:1-12 presses on us this morning is that **Jesus’ Word must rule our reason before we can trust in His resurrection.** To work out the implications of that statement, I want to explore four ways that revelation, reason, and resurrection relate to one another. First, Resurrection Confuses Reason (1-4). Resurrection Requires Revelation (5-8). Reason Rejects Revelation (9-11). Reason Stands in Awe of Resurrection (12). Luke 24:1-12 challenges us to believe that Jesus’ word is what makes sense of His resurrection. And I hope by the end of our time together you’ll believe that the greatest nonsense in the world is not to accept Jesus’ resurrection, but to reject it.

## 1. RESURRECTION CONFUSES REASON (LUKE 24:1-4)

The text says in v.1 that these women who had prepared spices to anoint Jesus’ body for burial arrive at his tomb *“on the first day of the week,”* the day after the Jewish Sabbath. Incidentally, this is why the early church began the practice of meeting on Sundays rather than on Saturdays, as was the custom for the Jewish synagogue (Cf. Acts 20:7; 1Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). And this is why we celebrate the Lord’s Day on Sunday. It’s also why every Sunday of the year is actually Resurrection Sunday, not just the one we call Easter. Verse 1 also indicates that it’s *“at early dawn”* when these women go to the tomb. They’re eager to express their devotion to Jesus. They would have treated his body with spices and ointments on the previous day, but that was the Sabbath, the day of rest. So first thing Sunday morning ó they take the spices they had prepared on Friday and go to the tomb to prepare Jesus’ corpse for burial. Their devotion to Jesus takes priority, and ours should as well.

Now notice, these women are not expecting an empty tomb. They are expecting to prepare a corpse for burial. They expect to find Jesus’ body just as they had seen it laid in the tomb the previous Friday. These are the same women from 23:55 who had followed Joseph of Arimathea *“and saw the tomb and how his body was laid.”* They had seen it with their own eyes. They saw which tomb it was, and how Jesus’ body was positioned in it. So naturally, they’re expecting to find Jesus’ body lying there, just as they had seen Joseph lay it there. But instead in v.2 *“They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”* They find what they didn’t expect, and they don’t find what they did expect. There they are with their spices in hand, yet they find the stone rolled away, and the body nowhere to be found.

They're stumped. Look there in v.4 *While they were perplexed about this*, literally *at a loss* (BAGD, 97). Luke uses the same word in Acts 25:20 when Festus explains to Agrippa about Paul's case *Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem.* There is a distinct note of incompetence that leads to paralysis. I don't know how to proceed because I don't know what to make of the case in hand. This is the first human reaction to the resurrection – not just confusion, but incompetence about how to make sense of it, how to handle it, what to do about it. They have no idea what to make of it. They can't even get off of square one – and they're sympathetic to Jesus! Resurrection was no more intuitive to the ancient mind than it is to the modern mind. We shouldn't flatter ourselves by thinking that it's our advancement in modernity and our sophisticated, scientific mindset that makes Jesus' resurrection hard to believe. The resurrection of Jesus has always been hard to believe. Ancient people expected dead people to stay in their tombs just like modern people expect the dead to stay in their tombs.

Now think about this again. Even if you are already sympathetic to Jesus' plight, even if you have an initial, emotional concern for Him, you don't know where to look for him. You cannot find Jesus for yourself, even if you intend to take His side. You cannot make your way to Him; you will look in the wrong place. Unaided human reason assumes that it will find Jesus where He can never be found. He must find you. Jesus' resurrection humbles human reason. To understand and believe in Jesus' resurrection, you first have to realize that you are at a loss. You have to come to an end of yourself. You have to admit the inadequacy of your own reason to make heads or tails of the resurrection.

Now human reason loves to play devil's advocate and cast doubt on the truthfulness of the report here. But think about it. If this were a fabricated story, you'd expect a little more from these women. I mean, where's the heroism? Where's the female intuition that figures it all out on the spot with no help? What kind of heroines are at a complete loss about what to do? This is not the most flattering picture that's being painted here. There's no image management going on here. These women are appearing on screen with zero make-up. This is not an air-brushed picture that Luke gives us. There they are, in all their incompetence, unable to make heads or tails of the situation until two angels appear and remind them that they should have been expecting it all along, because Jesus had predicted it more than once.

Look there in v.4. *While they were perplexed about this, behold two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.* These men are angels. Their dazzling apparel gives them away. And there are two of them probably because they are acting as witnesses to the resurrection, corroborating what happened (John 20:12; Acts 1:10; 10:30). These women were so confused, so at a loss, that they needed supernatural help to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. People don't believe in the reality of Jesus' resurrection because of a logical argument, even though valid arguments exist. Even the people who would have wanted to believe it the most had to have supernatural help for the idea of resurrection to even occur to them. The resurrection of Jesus is so confusing to our reason that we need supernatural help in understanding and believing it, which leads us to our second point [*Lord*, Acts 2].

## **2. RESURRECTION REQUIRES REVELATION (LUKE 24:5-8)**

*And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground....* What kind of heroines have to have supernatural beings appear and explain everything, and when these angels appear, the women go limp-kneed instead of acting all chummy with the cherubs? It rings true, doesn't it? Now look there in v.5 at what the angels say to the women to convince them that Jesus is risen from the dead. *The men said to them, '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.'* And they remembered His words. What a gracious and yet firm way of correcting these women, *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* From the women's perspective, they're not seeking the living at all. They're seeking someone they think is dead. They showed up to anoint a corpse. Yet the angels make it clear that they don't even know what kind of Jesus they're seeking. They should be seeking a living Jesus, not a dead one. To look for Him in His tomb is to look for Him in the wrong place. You'll never find him there. You

cannot expect to find Jesus if you still think he is dead. You cannot look down and find Jesus. You have to look up. You cannot seek the living among the dead. You cannot look into His tomb, nor can you look into your own soul, dead in its sins, and find Jesus there. It's not like that old Survivor Song from the 1980s, "The search is over, you were with me all the while." Jesus was not with you all the while. The natural human heart is dead in its trespasses and sins. Jesus even says that the most moral people of his day were whitewashed tombs, washing the outside and leaving the inside filthy. Don't seek the living among the dead. That's the error of Protestant Liberalism – seeking Jesus in unredeemed humanity. You'll never find Jesus if you think he lives inside all of humanity. *He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you....*"

Phil Ryken says of this passage that the resurrection is not self-explanatory. In other words, human reason alone cannot put together the empty tomb in a way that fits every piece into the puzzle. We need the words of Jesus to interpret His own actions and accomplishments. To understand even the bare fact of Jesus' resurrection, much less its spiritual and cosmic significance, we need to hear Jesus explain it to us again. The angels are quoting Jesus' previous predictions of His own death and resurrection from Luke 9: **9:22** "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." **9:44** "Let these words sink into your ears; The son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. **18:33** "The Son of Man 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." But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."

Even when people have the advantage of being taught by Jesus Himself, in His personal presence, we still need supernatural help in understanding and even just remembering what He said. That is so humbling, isn't it? We cannot even remember what he said, much less understand what it means, without supernatural help! That's how fallen our own reason is. We don't get it. So look at the tactic that the angels use in convincing the women. They don't present any physical evidence. There is no "Exhibit A" in a clear zip-lock bag set on the courtroom table. There is no CSI episode where the investigators rope off the area, gather evidence, run it all through their technological wizardry with cool background music, and come out with some supposedly air-tight hypothesis of what exactly happened here. There's not even a logical argument moving from premise to conclusion. All there is, at this point anyway, is Jesus' bare word, a quote. "Remember how he told you!" The evidence will come later. Jesus will appear to them Himself, in His resurrected body, for them to see and touch. But the faith that these women are challenged to exercise here is trust in Jesus' word alone, before the visible evidence comes in from the lab. To trust in Jesus' resurrection is to trust first in Him, personally, and in His word about His resurrection. This is why, as Christians, we should use the Bible in evangelism. Evidence is good, but Scripture is better, because Scripture comes to reason with the right to rule, whereas evidence comes to reason hoping for approval. Luke 24 teaches that even when we are favorably disposed to Jesus, **His word must rule our reason before we can believe in His resurrection.**

To accept the resurrection of Jesus as truth, you first have to admit that you are at a loss to explain the empty tomb yourself. You have to admit the total incompetence of your own reason in understanding why Jesus' body is not still in His tomb as you expected it to be. And then you have to listen to someone else. You have to listen to Jesus in the supernatural revelation of Scripture, predicting, proclaiming, explaining to you that it would happen – that it had to happen – in just this way. You have to submit your reason to God's revelation. But don't expect an angel – if you have Scripture, you have the Bible; and even if God did send an angel to explain it to you, that angel would do the same thing to you as he said to the women. "Remember how Jesus said!"

The authority for believing in Jesus' resurrection is not in the pronouncement of science by means of a crime scene investigation. The authority for believing in Jesus' resurrection is the pronouncement of Jesus Himself, the word that explained the resurrection before it happened, not after the fact. There's a question behind the question. The question in Luke 24 is what happened to Jesus' body. But the question behind that question is, should Jesus be trusted? Can we take Him at His word? Was Jesus right when he predicted that he would rise

from the dead? Resurrection requires the explanation of revelation. You cannot see the empty tomb for what it is until you take Jesus at His word. Until you remember what Jesus said about his resurrection, you will look for Him in the wrong place. You will look for the living among the dead. You will look for Him in pagan philosophy. You will look for Him in the native human spirit. You will look for Him in secular philanthropy and humanistic morality. And there will be two angels waiting for you at each of those tombs saying, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you.”* Yet even when we have supernatural revelation, the natural tendency of human reason is to reject it, which leads us to our third point.

### **3. REASON REJECTS REVELATION (LUKE 24:9-11)**

In v.9 the women return from the tomb *“and they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.”* That is the right response to revelation – remember Jesus’ word about the resurrection, and tell others about it! These women are models of faith in Jesus that naturally and eagerly produces evangelism. Their first impulse is *“we have to tell everyone else!”* Jesus is not dead – He is alive! That should be a major part of our evangelism, telling people that Jesus is risen from the dead. That is what makes Christianity unique. No other leader of any major religion claims to be back from the dead. Buddha, the Dalai Lama, Mohammed, none of them claim to be back from the dead. Hinduism might claim reincarnation from one body to another, but not the resurrection of the same body into a glorified form. Christianity is unique in proclaiming the redemption of this life, this self, this body. The hope of Christianity is that Jesus is the first-fruits of a greater resurrection. He is the firstborn from the dead. He is the model, the pattern of new and everlasting life. And we will see in the next two weeks that the body He was raised with had the nail prints from his crucifixion. It was the same body made new, made alive, resurrected, after having been genuinely dead.

What is most frustrating and disheartening about my present sinful reality is me. It is realizing that I am the problem. I am the sinner. I am the one who keeps sinning. It is not my spouse. It is not my disobedient kids. It is not my petty friends. It is not my backbiting classmates or my demanding boss or my annoying neighbors or my godless culture. It is my heart, it is my sinful nature, because if I were not sinful, then the devil and the world would have nothing to appeal to in my heart to get me to sin. If I were not so sinful, my spouse’s weaknesses and my friends’ habits and my co-workers sarcasm wouldn’t irk me. But all these things get to me and make me want to sin precisely because I am sinful, and I already want to sin, because there is nothing good in my flesh. And the hope of Christianity is not that I will die and become something totally unrelated to what I have been. It is that God will take me – me – and raise me from the dead and give me a new body and a new nature that has no affinity for sin whatsoever. I will still be me, but I will be sinless. And what is so wonderful is that when I believe in Jesus’ word about His resurrection, He unites me to Himself in His death and resurrection, and God gives me that new nature now. I am raised with Jesus to new life now, and God begins to renew that new nature in me now so that gradually, I become more and more like Jesus, until Jesus Himself returns from heaven to glorify His children and complete His work in us so that no more sin remains, and yet I will still be me, but a me totally cleansed of my sin and renewed completely in the image of Jesus. That is the hope of Christian resurrection, that is the hope that we should be talking about with others, and the hope we should encourage each other with.

In v.10 Luke names the women who come from Jesus empty tomb. *“Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.”* Luke names these women because they are probably the personal sources for His biography of Jesus. They are the eyewitnesses from chapter 1:4 who delivered the narrative to him. *“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”* Notice how Luke honors these women. He treats them as reliable eyewitnesses and bases his account of Jesus’ resurrection on their testimony.

They are Luke's witnesses, and they are Christ's witnesses. Woman of God, let that encourage you. You are to be a witness to the resurrection of Jesus ó not just your husband, not just your children. It is your privilege to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ among your friends and neighbors.

Yet as faithful as these women are, their words fall on deaf ears. In v.10, they tell these words to the apostles, the very men who would end up preaching God's word and leading His church in the book of Acts. Yet look at how they initially respond to the gospel in v.11. *õBut these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.ö* The phrase *õthese wordsö* refers to what the women were saying. So, what were they saying? They were saying what the angels had told them. Well, what had the angels told them? The angels told them to remember Jesus's words. And it's these words, Jesus's words, applied to His own resurrection, that the apostles consider an idle tale. The word translated *õidle taleö* is λῆρος, literally, nonsense (BDAG 473). The idea that Jesus had actually risen from the dead sounded like total nonsense to them, especially now that he had died. That word nonsense was normally used to describe the gibberish that a mentally insane person would speak. The idea that Jesus had risen from the dead sounded like the irrational babbling of a nutcase in a mental ward ó to the apostles, no less! And as a result, *õThey did not believe,ö* which is actually in the imperfect tense (ἠπίσταν), which stresses the ongoing nature of their unbelief. The word *õtoldö* in v.11 is also an imperfect. The women kept telling the apostles, and the apostles kept refusing to believe. They weren't buying it, no matter how many times the women said it. It seemed like a pleasant fiction at best, and at worst, it was total baloney. Jesus's resurrection was nonsense even to the apostles at first. And yet the resurrection of Jesus is no less true simply because our reason finds it unbelievable.

This is the natural response of the natural human heart to the gospel of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. It seems like nonsense. Our hearts are not just agnostic or skeptical. We're obstinate. And here again, it's not just Jesus's enemies that refuse to believe. It's His friends. The very people who had the greatest emotional reason to believe, couldn't bring themselves to believe it. Even after they were reminded that Jesus Himself had predicted His own resurrection multiple times during His earthly ministry, the apostles can't swallow it. And this is actually good evidence for the truthfulness of Jesus's resurrection. The apostles were not simply Jesus freaks who had been waiting for this moment all along because they knew it was coming. They did not experience an unbroken stream of gullibility about Jesus from his public ministry through to his resurrection. The apostles themselves started out as unbelievers. They weren't just skeptics. They were scoffers. They thought of Jesus's resurrection as nonsense. They found it impossible to believe in the resurrection of the dead even after Jesus Himself had taught them that He would rise! The very people who were taught directly by Jesus to believe in His resurrection could hardly believe it themselves. Now look at these men. Do they appear to be sophisticated in their skepticism? Do they look smart and savvy? No. They don't look like the sharpest tools in the shed, do they? They look like fools for not believing. They look like hard-headed, hard-hearted, obstinate, stubborn, pig-headed, dim-wits for rejecting supernatural revelation about Jesus's resurrection. Here is the light, flooding in the window, and they draw the curtains. Yea, that's unaided human reason trying to make sense of the empty tomb, even when it has supernatural revelation. It's the darkness of human despondency refusing to see the sun shining in the sky on a perfectly clear day. And that is the irony and tragedy of human unbelief. Human reason thinks Jesus's resurrection is nonsense, when the real madness is not to believe it.

#### **4. REASON STANDS IN AWE OF RESURRECTION (LUKE 24:12)**

What I mean is that reason, unaided by faith in Jesus's word, can only marvel at the reports of Jesus's resurrection. That's as far as reason can take you. Unaided reason can only stand drop-jawed at the empty tomb. It can see that Jesus is not there. Reason can see that the linen burial cloths are sitting there with no one to wear them. It can even reason that if some of Jesus's disciples stole the body, then what possible reason would they have for removing the linen cloths and leaving them there? Yet unaided, unredeemed, sin-ridden reason cannot take the next step toward exercising actual, saving faith in Jesus. It can only stand amazed and await a personal encounter with the risen Christ Himself, which is exactly what the disciples will get later in chapter 24.

When Luke says in v.12 that Peter went home marveling at what happened, both the marveling and *ōwhat happenedō* are really ambiguous. Marveling in the gospels is the reaction of people who don't know what to think of what's happening, or who Jesus is, even though they are duly impressed. In Luke 1, people marvel at Zechariah's delay in the temple, and later in chapter one they marvel that he names his son John. In chapter 2, Mary and Joseph marvel at what the shepherd's relay to them about the message of the angels as they watched over their flocks by night. And in Luke 4:22 everyone marvels at the gracious words coming from Jesus's mouth, yet by the end of the chapter they try to throw Him off a cliff. The disciples themselves marvel at Jesus in chapter 8 when he stills the storm at sea, yet they end the episode by asking *ōWho then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey Him?ō* And in chapter 9, it's specifically while everyone is marveling at all the miracles Jesus is doing that he leans over to his disciples and says *ōLet these words sink into your hears; the son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.ō*

Marveling and faith are two different things, especially in the gospel of Luke. And here in chapter 24, we don't even know what it is that Peter is marveling at. What exactly did Peter think had happened? Is he marveling simply at the empty tomb, or is he marveling that Jesus rose from the dead? We don't know. Luke doesn't tell us. All he tells us is that Peter ran to the tomb to check it out for himself. So this probably isn't saving faith just yet, especially since Peter is among those who did not believe the women in v.11; but it's a good sign that Peter is acting on what he has heard, even though he is apparently one of those who thinks that what he heard was nonsense. So he goes and tries to see the nonsense for himself. It's more than Luke can say for the rest of them. Luke distinguishes Peter from the rest by contrast when he says *ōBut Peter rose and ran to the tomb.ō*

Friend, you have to consider the claims of Jesus for yourself. That's what Peter is doing. He goes to see the nonsense for himself. He acts on what he's heard. Yet just because you're interested in Jesus, or even amazed by Him, just because you might be checking Him out for yourself, doesn't necessarily mean that you have saving faith yet. Amazement, marveling, being impressed, none of these things are equal to saving faith. And that's just the thing *ō* that's all your unaided reason can do with Jesus, is to be amazed and wonder and stand in awe. Reason can take you to the point of wonder. The truth of the matter, both for the apostles and for us, is that we believe in Jesus's resurrection in spite of ourselves. J.C. Ryle said that *ōThe [initial] unbelief of the apostles is one of the strongest indirect evidences that Jesus rose from the dead. If the disciples were at first so backward to believe in our Lord's resurrection, and were at last so thoroughly persuaded of its truth that they preached it everywhere, Christ must have risen indeed. The first preachers were men who were convinced in spite of themselves, and in spite of determined, obstinate unwillingness to believe.ō* (Ryle, *Luke* 2:495).

## CONCLUSION

**Jesus' Word must rule our reason before we can trust in His resurrection.** Jesus's resurrection confuses our reason. We have no idea what to make of it *ō* unaided reason is at a total loss to explain or make sense of the empty tomb. That's why understanding Jesus's resurrection requires revelation. Reason cannot bring itself to a right understanding or acceptance of the empty tomb. And yet even when we encounter revelation from heaven, even when we are reminded of Jesus's very words, our reason naturally rejects God's revelation as nonsense. And so all the further reason can get is to stand in awe of Jesus's resurrection, drop-jawed at the empty tomb, marveling at what happened, yet all the while wondering, *−what exactly was it that happened?ō* God's revelation makes sense of the resurrection. But you have to hear the word of Jesus. The word of Jesus Himself, about His own resurrection, has to come to you with full power and conviction. And we'll see in the next two weeks that to really understand the resurrection, it can't simply be you looking for Jesus. The risen Christ Himself must find you and explain to you that this is what is written about Him in all the Scriptures. Does the resurrection still seem like nonsense to you? Repent of your own nonsense and believe in the risen Christ. *ōWhy do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you...?ō*