

My Friends, today's sermon is from Luke 24:1-27... "The Resurrection"

The resurrection of Christ is the central event of the Christian faith...And according to early records, the death of our Lord Jesus took place on Friday, the 15th day of the month of Nisan, which is the first month of the Israelite calendar between March and April...His body was then placed, that evening, in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, who had petitioned Pilate for the body of Christ Jesus...

Early ancient Jewish tombs, were hand hewn and cut into the rock face of a hill or mountain, and were used more commonly for Jews of high rank or station...Discoveries in antiquity have shown that these tombs included an "arched" entrance, and a semicircular alcove containing flat shelves for the bodies...

A solid disc-shaped stone, several inches thick and roughly a yard or more in diameter, depending on the tomb's entrance size...would be rolled down a slanted groove to cover the entry, primarily to keep out hungry animals and such...And while it was quite feasible for but a few persons to roll the stone down to close the tomb...it would take several more than that, to roll the stone back up the groove to open the tomb's entrance...

It is also interesting to note, that in accordance with ancient Jewish practices regarding burial, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, as depicted in the Gospels, was *unused*...meaning that it was empty and no one else had been previously buried there...Now keep in mind that Jesus was regarded by the Jews as a criminal, guilty of blasphemy, when He was crucified...

And early Jewish burial practices specified that burying a criminal in the same tomb with others would defile the bodies of anyone interred there...therefore, it is likely that Joseph would *not* have placed Jesus' corpse in his tomb if any others had already been buried there...

Furthermore, Jesus' interment must have occurred that Friday *before* the evening star appeared, because early Jews also regarded crucifixion as a form of hanging...and in-keeping with their beliefs, the body of anyone executed by hanging or crucifixion was cursed by God and could not remain on the tree overnight, lest the land be defiled as written in Deuteronomy 21:22 & 23...which says...

- "And if a man commits a sin punishable by death, and so he is put to death and you hang him on a tree,

- his dead body shall not hang on the tree, but certainly you shall bury him on that day, for cursed by God is one that is being hung; so you shall not defile your land that Yahweh your God is giving to you as an inheritance.”

So it was, that since the next day was not only the Sabbath but also the Passover, the Jewish Priests and Scribes of the Sanhedrin certainly would not have wanted the land to be defiled on that particularly sacred Jewish holiday...and if the body of a condemned criminal was not claimed, it would be buried in a common pit.

This might have also lended itself to the explanation of *why* Joseph of Arimathea, who it is said was a veiled disciple of Jesus, had earlier asked Pilate for Jesus' body so that it could be removed from the cross and interred before nightfall that Friday...and thereby, giving Our Lord a *proper* burial...

As we begin chapter 24...the women from Galilee, who had witnessed Jesus being laid in the tomb, had made-ready the burial spices, and were now returning to the tomb...as Luke tells us in verse 1...

V. 1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared.

Now it was Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, who had supplied the traditional spices for the anointing of Our Lord's body...as it is mentioned in John 19:39...

- And Nicodemus, the one who had come to him formerly at night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about a hundred pounds.

As the women were on their way to the tomb, they were walking and discussing *who* would roll the stone away from the entrance for them...as it says in Mark 16:3...

- And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”

Then, Luke tells us in the next two verses 2 & 3, what the women discovered, to their surprise, as they arrived...

V. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

V. 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

It was soon after Jesus had been removed from the cross and taken to the tomb, that the Priests and Scribes of the Sanhedrin had asked Pilate to place guards outside the tomb...because they were afraid that the disciples of Jesus would remove His body and claim that He rose from the dead...in-keeping with the prophecy that He would arise on the third day following His death...

There are accounts in Scripture, that tells us guards *were* placed there at the tomb to keep watch...additionally, seals were also attached to the round stone covering the tomb's entrance...so that if there were any attempt to remove the stone, the seals would be broken giving evidence of an effort to steal the body of Christ...

When the women arrived at the tomb, they found the entrance open and the stone rolled back, and a similar account of this can be found in Matthew 28:2...which reads...

- And behold, a great earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.

In Matthew's account, he goes on to say that this angel also struck fear into the guards and they became as dead men...

In both accounts, it is said that the stone was "*rolled away*" from the entrance to the tomb...clearly indicating that the stone did not just fall over from an earthquake, it was moved out of the way on purpose.

Now, the women did not see the body of our Lord when they looked inside the tomb, and as a result, assumed that someone had removed His body and took it elsewhere...So, Luke tells us in verses 4 & 5...

V. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing;

V. 5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead?”

So, while there seems to be slight differences between the actual accounts of what occurred...there are, nonetheless, parallel statements in these Gospels claiming that the stone was indeed *rolled away*...including reported appearances of angelic beings...so we can surmise that it is highly likely an angelic being, or beings, may have been the supernatural force that removed the stone, and *also* spoke to the women...

Brothers and Sisters, imagine just for a moment, if you will, how shocking this must have been for these women...in their deep deep sadness at the death of Our Lord, they had simply come to anoint His body with the burial spices they had worked to prepare...and instead of finding Jesus in the tomb, the stone is rolled back, Jesus is gone, and angels are questioning them about why they are looking for Him...

Let's look at verses 6 thru 8, where Luke tells us what the angels say to the women...

V. 6 “He is not here, but He is risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

V.7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

V.8 And they remembered His words,

The accounts mention the appearance of a being or beings dressed in brilliant white clothing, indicating their heavenly angelic nature...asking the women why they are looking for the Christ when He has risen, in accordance with what He had said and what had been prophesied in scripture...and then, it was only at that point, that they remembered what Jesus had said...

These blessed women (Mary Magdelene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and some of the other women) went promptly back to the house where the Apostles were and told them exactly what happened...

Now, of course, to the Apostles, this all seemed impossible, because all of them were in doubt of what Our Lord told them would happen after His death...so here's what Luke says happens next in verses 11 & 12...

V. 11 But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

V. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

Brothers and Sisters, can you imagine hearing these words from the women...of course it was shocking news...news from angels that Jesus had *actually* risen from the dead...something that seemed absolutely impossible...so it says here that Peter *ran* to the tomb, he didn't stroll or walk, he didn't even walk fast, he *ran*...

And what he found when he got there, was simply the burial shroud that our Lord had been wrapped in, when His body had been laid in the tomb...of course, Peter was not alone, he was accompanied by other apostles who ran to the tomb with him...and now, as they peered into the empty tomb, they were all witnesses to the burial shroud being the only thing there...

The burial linen that Jesus was wrapped (or bound) in was of fine quality and bright white, similar to that woven for luxurious garments worn by Egyptian Pharaohs..."Linen" (from the Greek word "Sindon"), according to the Bible, is linked to wealth or honor, and to the holiness of God and of those associated with Him, and also symbolized moral purity...

Not long afterwards, two of the apostles were on their way to a village called Emmaus, approximately seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking about the things that had happened with Jesus, when apparently, they are joined by another person...see what Luke says in verses 15 & 16...

V. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them.

V. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.

What a surprise this must have been for them, don't you agree...here they are, deep in discussion on a seven mile walk down a dusty road, when out-of-the-blue someone pops-up next to them...now, if you've ever been on a hike or long walk, you know that roughly a three mile pace is not a stroll but comfortable...so seven miles at that pace would mean a little over a two hour trek...plenty of time to talk about the crucifixion of Our Lord and His empty tomb...

So, while they are walking and talking with Jesus at their side...listen to what Luke tells us in verses 17 & 18...

V. 17 And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad.

V. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?”

Of the two disciples, Cleopas (which is Greek , and believed to be a short form of the name “Cleopatros”) is the *only* name mentioned...traditionally, it is suspected that the other disciple was *actually* Luke, who, being modest, didn't want to write himself into his own book...

Now, when Jesus asks them what they are talking about...Luke tells us they stop in the middle of the road, “*looking sad*”...and perhaps somewhat puzzled... because everyone in Jerusalem must have been talking about what happened to Jesus...and Jerusalem, at that time of Passover, was flooded with pilgrims...

Then, in verses 19 & 20...Jesus asks them “What things?” So, these two disciples proceed to tell Jesus about how He was a prophet, mighty in deed and word, in the sight of God and all people...and how the chief priests and rulers convicted Him unto death and crucified Him...

But then, they say this in the very next verse 21...

V. 21 “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.

Folks, did you catch that...“**We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel**”...they had no idea they were speaking to Jesus, did they? And they also, still had the imbedded Jewish belief of a “conquering Messiah” within them...they still did not realize, that by His death on the cross, and His resurrection...Jesus had *indeed*, conquered death, and most certainly *had* redeemed Israel, as well as *all* mankind...

So, while all three are walking down the road, the two disciples continue to tell Jesus what happened when the women returned to the house and explained what they had found at the tomb in verses 22 to 24...

V. 22 “But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning,

V. 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.”

V. 24 “Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

You see here, that the two disciples, were still not able to recognize Him and didn't know that they were talking to Jesus...But what's more, in their sadness, they also did *not* believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, *in spite* of what the angels had told the women...so Luke tells us what Jesus says to them in verses 25 & 26...

V. 25 And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”

V. 26 “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

Jesus is implying that the two disciples should have known what had been prophesied...and should have *believed* in what He Himself had told them would happen to Him...as it had been written about the Messiah, along with the proof that was in the very miracles that He had performed, indicating that it was actually He that was the one written about.

So, Luke tells us in the last verse of this sermon, that Our Lord goes on to instruct them concerning what had been prophesied and written about Him from the early days of Moses...as it says in verse 27...

V. 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Brothers and Sisters, we are extremely blessed to have God's word, written in the Bible, to teach us and to tell us what happened so very long ago...and we are extremely blessed with this knowledge...that we can believe in the resurrection of Our Lord and savior Jesus, even without looking into His empty tomb or hearing about it from angels...

Written in the Gospel of John, as Jesus is speaking to Thomas, in the latter part of verse 29 of chapter 20, it says...

- Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

My Friends, although we have not *personally* seen Our Lord's death and resurrection, it is by our belief in Christ Jesus and His teachings, that the stone is rolled away from our hearts...and it is by our *actual* belief in His resurrection, that we too are resurrected from sin and death, and raised up to be with Him in heaven...

If we do not believe in Jesus and His resurrection, then we do not believe in the Gospel...remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17...

- “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”

Every day, My Friends, I say to God... “Here I am Lord, I believe!” Will you say this to Him as well? “Here I am Lord, I believe!”

Let's close in a word of prayer...

Almighty Father, we are here before you and we believe in you...we give all praise and glory to you...we pray for those who are lost and do not know of your loving grace...we ask that you show them mercy and help us to reach them with the knowledge of your word...help us to humbly serve others as your Son Jesus did...help us to forgive others as your Son Jesus did...and help us to love others as your Son Jesus did...”Here we are Lord, We believe!” And we ask these things of You, as we pray in your Son's name, Jesus...AMEN