

Up from the Grave He Arose

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While I was driving around this week, I noticed that every church had some sort of resurrection theme on its billboard. So, I thought, “Are they copying me?” Then I thought, “Well, maybe I’m copying them.” But, either way, we are not going to let you down. Now, if you come to church and all you ever hear is a resurrection message or a message on Jesus’ birth, you should probably come more than twice a year.

I don’t know if you’ve ever read through all four Gospel resurrection accounts—just sat down, and found them in each Gospel, and read them through, [but] this is what you would discover: there are a lot of differences. As a matter of fact, there are so many differences that it can be really confusing. It can even make you wonder, “Is this the same resurrection? Surely Jesus didn’t rise more than once.” And, because of this, some have proposed that the resurrection isn’t true, or that the Gospel writers were confused, or it’s just a big myth. [They’ve also said] that the Church has believed a lie and [that] different people at different times have “promoted the myth” of the resurrection, and Christians just want to believe it so badly [that] they just do it against all sound reason.

And those who love to hate God have always been champions of attacking the resurrection because on the resurrection all of Christianity rises or falls. It’s not one of those minor, little side doctrines that you don’t really need to believe to be a Christian. Oh, yes, you do. It is one of the pillars of

the faith, when it comes to things that you must believe. And if you can prove [that] the resurrection is wrong, then Christianity is wrong, Christ didn't rise from the dead, He didn't conquer death, He didn't make atonement for sins, He's not coming back in judgment, and we're all just going to die and perish. That's it. *If* He didn't rise from the dead. Satan knows this, and that is why he has always proposed the lie that the resurrection isn't true.

Invariably, every year people will bring me articles, and newspaper clippings, and magazine sections all explaining how the resurrection isn't true. You don't have to bring me any more—I've seen them. I throw them away every year. And, thank you, yes, I know [they're] out there.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, discusses this. It was right after Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to all those people, and it was unmistakable, [but] still people were doubting it. And Paul said this: "Listen, if the resurrection isn't true, [then] the preaching of the gospel is in vain [and] faith is in vain. Those who preach the gospel are liars, you are still in your sins, [and] those who have died trusting in Christ have died and perished forever. And, above all people on the earth, Christians are, of all of them, most to be pitied because we are so deluded and ignorant in thinking that Jesus rose from the dead. If, in fact, He did not rise" [see 1 Corinthians 15:12–19].

Well, the question is, how do we account for the differences in the resurrection [stories]. When you start looking at them all, you see [that] this one says this, and that one says that. And, if you were to read [things written by] secular people—those who want to try and disprove the Bible—they make it sound like there have been convocations of the greatest Bible scholars in the world, who have gathered together to try to figure out this unsolvable mystery. And now, they're stumped and they have to admit [that] the resurrection didn't happen, but go ahead and believe the myth. That's how they make it sound.

But, it's really simple. [There are] three things [that help us to understand the "discrepancies" between the Gospels.] First, the reason there are four Gospels instead of just one is [that] God wanted to emphasize four different themes in the life of Christ. That's all. It was never the intention of any of the

Gospel writers to write down a comprehensive account of the resurrection. And so, it is erroneous to say, “Well, they don’t seem to include all of the information, therefore the Bible is wrong.”

Second, if one Gospel writer includes certain information and another Gospel writer leaves that information out, that doesn’t mean that the Bible contradicts itself. You know, if I call up my brother and say, “Hey. Guess who came to church?”

And he says, “Who?” And I tell him about three people that he knows (he lives in Washington). Now, does that mean that only those three people came to church? Well, of course not. “Well, that’s all you said!” Well, so? Here you are.

Third, and finally, the Gospel writers don’t tell us everything we want to know, they tell us everything *God* wants us to know. And while the Gospels give us all accurate information about the resurrection and many other details about Christ’s life, you need to remember that it was never their intent to try and give us a precise, chronological account of every single detail that happened [in order] to [satisfy] our curiosity [or] to [answer] all the questions that we might have about the resurrection. God tells us what we need to know, and each Gospel writer tells us what we need to know to [understand] the themes in the life of Christ.

This morning we’re going to look at Luke 24:1–12. Before we do that, [however], I thought I would give two introductions to the text: one [that is] kind of an emotional introduction (I’m not going to cry, so, don’t worry), and then a chronological introduction. And you’ll see what I mean—once I give you these [introductions], our text is going to be clear. I’ve never done this before, the interpretation of our text before we get to it.

So, I want you to just go back in time with me to that first century, when Jesus was about to be crucified. Think about what it was like to live back then. You are one of Jesus’ followers, and Jesus has been roaming around the country for three years. You have left your family—maybe your family has rejected you, and said, “Listen, if you follow this Jesus guy, it’s over. You are cut off. We are no longer going to even consider you our family

member.” And so, you’ve left your family. You’ve left your business. You’ve lost any reputation you had among the religious leaders of Israel because now you’re following that guy who says that the religious leaders of Israel are hypocrites.

You’ve really gambled all to follow Jesus, but it’s been great, because as you’ve followed Him, you’ve heard teaching like you have never heard before. Jesus doesn’t quote “rabbi this” and “rabbi that,” He just says what’s true. He never quotes anybody; He just quotes Himself. He just says it, and He teaches “as one having authority” [Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22]. You listen to [Him] and you think, “Man, this is incredible. This is clear. This is understandable. This is amazing!” as [Christ] opens up the true meaning of God’s Word, which has been covered up by the religious leaders of the day. Not only that, you see Him heal people. He’s kind of like a roaming hospital—He just goes through towns and anybody who’s sick, He just heals [them]: crippled people, blind people, lepers. He even raises people from the dead.

You’ve seen all of it, and you have become totally convinced that this man, Jesus, is the Messiah, the Coming King of Israel; that He is going to overthrow Rome; He is going to establish His kingdom on earth; and you are going to be on the in because you’re following Him, and you’re trusting in Him, and everything is wonderful. You’ve seen His power, you’ve heard His teaching, and you just can’t wait. You’re wondering, “What’s taking Him so long? He’s kind of taunting us. It’s going to be so great when He takes that power that He used to stop the sea and He’s going to just wipe out Rome.”

And so, there’s this sense of expectation. There are a lot of people that you run into who know about John the Baptist, who were baptized by John, and some may have even known Zacharias and Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s parents, and know how the angel appeared to [Zacharias] and then how he lost his voice and all the miraculous deeds concerning John the Baptist. Or, maybe they know Mary. Or [they] have heard about Mary, and how Mary was a virgin, and how the shepherds came and saw her baby, and

magi—these king-makers from the East—came all the way over to worship Jesus as a king. And you know people—maybe you’re one of them. You have left all to follow Jesus. You’re convinced He’s the Messiah.

What’s really great is, five days before Jesus’ crucifixion—Monday of the week—Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt and the people are just en masse. They’ve got palm branches, and they’re laying them down, and they’re saying, “Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the LORD; Hosanna in the highest!” [Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:10]. And they’re all shouting [this], and you’re thinking, “Oh, it’s happening. It is happening! Jesus is going to be king. Everybody is going to receive Him, Rome is going to be overthrown, and Israel is going to be exalted among the nations on the earth, just as the prophets said. Oh, man! It’s getting good!”

But, little do you know that at that very time, a plot is being hatched by the religious leaders who have found a mole among the apostles: Judas. Judas has been a follower of Christ, but he hasn’t followed Christ because he loves Him, because he needs [Him] as his Savior, but because he wants power. He wants prestige. He wants money. And this was a chance to get ahead—maybe get in good with the religious establishment [and] make some money. [There were] certain hard-hearted religious leaders among the Jews who were threatened by Jesus because Jesus exposed their hypocrisy. [He] said they were unbelieving, said that they made disciples that were ten times more the children of hell than themselves, said that they were sinners, and that some prostitutes and tax collectors would get into heaven before them. Those people hate Jesus so much that they have now agreed with you, [Judas], to pay you thirty pieces of silver. And so, Judas says, “OK,” and then betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. It was prophesied in Zechariah 11:11–13: “that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” Thirty pieces of silver.

And so, if you’re one of the followers of Jesus, you see something very strange happen. [During] the Passover meal, Judas all of a sudden leaves, and you’re thinking to yourself, “Oh, he has to go get some supplies or something. I don’t know why he’s leaving.” But he betrays Jesus and it

ignites the fuse of a series of events that is the most traumatizing thing [you have experienced] in your *entire* life. Jesus is taken captive while He is praying in the garden. And to your horror, He is falsely accused. He is tried [and] false witnesses come forward and they *lie* about Him. Then they beat Him, and they spit upon Him, and they slap Him, and they torture Him, and they ridicule Him. And, you know what? The apostles, who seemed big and tough, who said, “Lord, we will never leave you. We will die before we leave you.” They all run away! Even big, bad Peter denies [Christ] three times and hides [see Matthew 26:34; Mark 26:75].

Ironically, the only followers who are left are a bunch of scared women, who are watching from a distance. Imagine their horror and grief; imagine if you were among them, seeing this person who you were totally convinced was the Messiah—you saw His power, you saw what He was able to do—and now He’s doing nothing. They’re just abusing Him and heaping scorn upon Him. And you’re thinking to yourself, “You know, I’ve left everything to follow Jesus. Has this all been for nothing? Has this all been for *nothing*?” Maybe you feel that the only possible consequence of this is that Jesus *couldn’t* be the Messiah—He couldn’t be the Savior, and Redeemer, and King of Israel. Look at Him! Maybe you feel despair because you have left everything to follow Jesus—you’ve walked away from your family, and your business, and you’ve become a traitor in the eyes of the religious leaders. And for what? You see Jesus get crucified and die. And there you stand, looking at Him, and you’re thinking, “I have given up all for what? A dead man? *A dead man*?” (You can imagine the trauma of this.)

You keep thinking to yourself, “He said He would come in glory. He must have lied. He said He would come back and establish His kingdom. He must have lied.” There He is, He’s on the cross. He’s dead. You’re wondering, “Has this entire three years been a joke? Has it been a huge, foolish mistake? Have I just been swept away by another false teacher?” Then you begin to fear, because you remember that Jesus said, “You’ll be hated by all on account of Me” [see Matthew 10:22, 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17]. You’re thinking, “You know, they killed Jesus, maybe they’re going to kill me.

Maybe they're going to hunt me down. Maybe they're going to crucify *me*." The Sabbath is coming and you don't know what to do. You're scared, and so you think, "OK, I'm going to go home and I'm just going to pray. I don't know *what* to do." You're just overcome with grief, and you're weeping, and you go home.

Now, keeping these things in mind, the emotional state of all the people mentioned in the story of the resurrection, let me just give you a chronological account of what could have happened. I say "could" because there are a lot of different ways you can establish the facts in such a way that they all agree—that's not hard to do. The question is whether the account I'm giving you is accurate. I am sure that it is probably not perfectly accurate, but it does include all of the facts. [It] is one possible way it could have worked out. As I go through here, you will get all the information from all four Gospels, and then when we get to Luke [24], you'll see what Luke left out, and I think the meaning will become quite clear.

So, after Jesus is tortured and crucified, He yields up His spirit to the Father [and] dies. Then, a soldier who is there to break the legs of the criminals because the Sabbath is approaching, sees [that] Jesus is dead [but] wants to make sure [so he] runs his spear into [Jesus'] side. And, sure enough, He's dead. Seeing He was dead, two of His secret followers, one a wealthy, influential member of the Jewish Council—the very Jewish Council that paid Judas to betray Jesus—Joseph of Arimathea, along with another Jewish leader—a leader of the Pharisees, who also conspired against Jesus—go to Pilate, ask for the body of Jesus, and are granted permission as soon as Pilate discovers that [Jesus] is, in fact, dead. Joseph and Nicodemus then go to the site of the crucifixion.

The Sabbath is approaching—maybe it's only an hour or two away. It's late in the afternoon. Nicodemus brings with him about seventy-five pounds of burial spices and other materials to embalm the body of Jesus. They take His body down and carry it to a nearby garden, where Joseph of Arimathea just happens to have his own personal tomb, carved out of solid rock, which no one has ever lain in. He says, "Let's put him in my tomb." So they do.

They make the preparations, they make a paste out of the spices, put it on [a] cloth and wrap Him [up] and basically make a mummy out of Him.

While they're doing this, several of the women, [and] maybe some of the men, are sitting outside the tomb, looking in. Among them are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph. They're all looking in, seeing all of this transpire, and they're grieving because they can't believe that Jesus is dead. The Sabbath is about to begin and, having finished their initial preparations, they all leave to go home. They're all going to go home. You can imagine how sad they were. They have suffered, and suffered, and suffered, watching Jesus suffer. Since Thursday, they have suffered. They're just in pain, they're in misery, and they don't know what to do.

[But] the Jewish leaders, who didn't believe Jesus at all, at least remembered that He would rise from the dead, according to His own words. And they're scared, and so they say, "OK. Let's just go to Pilate and say, 'We have an unusual request. Could you get a guard and get the guard and have [them] guard the body?'" You know, most bodies don't get up and go away, but their reasoning was, "We're fearful that because Jesus said He would rise again after three days the disciples are going to sneak in at nighttime, take the body, and [say], 'He's risen from the dead!' and the deception will be greater than when He was on earth!" So Pilate says, "OK, you can have a guard." And so, they take a guard and they go to the tomb. They take a huge stone and roll it in front of the tomb, and they put the seal of Rome on that stone. [The seal] means: If you touch this stone, you deal with the authority of Rome. And then they [use] a whole Roman guard to guard the dead body for three days, just to make sure that none of this "rising from the dead" nonsense comes to pass.

Well, Sunday finally comes—Sunday morning—and there are women who are around Jerusalem. The Scripture says there were many of them, [but] we don't know what that means, whether that means ten, or fifty, or more than that even. It's hard to say. But anyway, these women seem to have agreed, "Let's meet at the tomb at first light." So, they come, probably from different locations, and they're all gravitating toward the tomb, moving

toward the tomb, walking from wherever they live in the nearby area. They left when it was dark, and as they get there, it's just starting to get light. The sun is just shining out. Among them are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and others [who are] not mentioned specifically by name. They are also bringing spices to finish up the burial preparations.

While the women are en route, going from their homes to the tomb site, something happens at the tomb. There's this huge earthquake, the stone is rolled away, and an angel sits on it and is radiant in appearance. When the soldiers see the angel and feel the earthquake, they are so scared they faint. They faint! Over they go. When the soldiers come to, they look around, the angel is gone, and they say, "Let's get out of here!" They all go into the city to talk to the chief priests and tell them what happened. So the soldiers have just left, and all of a sudden, the women start arriving at the tomb. The soldiers, though, have gone to the chief priests, and they have said, "Hey. You aren't going to believe what happened." And they tell [the priests], and [the priests] say, "OK, this is what we want you to do. We want you to tell everybody this story. All agree to tell them this story: His disciples snuck in at nighttime—when you guys were standing guard, on pain of death—rolled the stone away—when you weren't watching—snuck in the tomb, unwrapped Jesus' body, took the body, and then put the wrappings back over the air so it looked like a body, and snuck Him away. We'll take care of Pilate." You see, at that time, if you were a guard and you didn't follow orders or you failed to do what you were told to do, they would kill you. So [the priests] paid [the soldiers] some money, and said, "We'll take care of your superior officers. Everything will be OK." And so the soldiers leave.

The women are almost at the tomb site at this time, and they're talking amongst themselves, saying, "Hey, who's going to roll the stone away? I mean, you know, there're quite a few of us here, but we're still women. Who's going to move the stone?" But when they get there, the stone's already [been] moved out of the way. Praise God! So the women enter the tomb and, to their surprise, they see Jesus' burial cloths there, but no Jesus in

the cloths. They wrapped Him up like a mummy, right after He died, and now it's just the cloths wrapped up, but there's no body in there. They were perplexed, and understandably so, because how do you get the body out of the wrappings without disturbing the wrappings?

Then, suddenly, two angels appear and the women are terrified. They fall down with their faces to the ground, and the angels say, "Do not be afraid," which, of course, is the standard angel greeting, because when you meet an angel, it's scary. "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen" [Luke 24:5–6]. They also exhort the women, saying, "Remember how [Jesus] spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" [24:6–7]. All of these women had heard Jesus teach about this. He'd told all of His followers about this, and even some who didn't believe Him about this. But it seemed to be too amazing, too weird, too supernatural. They had never had conversations with angels. All they knew was that they saw Jesus die [and] they were tired—they had probably been up for two-and-a-half days straight, mourning, weeping, worrying, praying, fretting, not knowing what to do. Jesus has been killed, and now His body's gone.

And so, the angels say, "Go back [and] tell [the disciples] that He has risen. Remind them of what He said, that He was going to meet them in Galilee." But the women, for some reason—because of fear, because of uncertainty, because they didn't know if the disciples would laugh at them because of the two angels that they supposedly saw—go back, and they all agree, "Let's not tell everybody about the 'shining guys.'" And so, Mary Magdalene gets there first, speaks up for the rest, and this is all she tells them the first time: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" [John 20:2].

And as soon as Peter and John hear this, they just bolt for the tomb, leaving Mary Magdalene with this other group of women where Peter and John [had been] staying. John ran up ahead and arrived at the tomb first. Peter came shortly after. John had stopped at the mouth [of the tomb] and did

not enter. Peter shot in, [then] John came in behind him. They saw nothing but the burial materials left behind, [with] no body in them, as if someone had just sucked the body out without touching the wrappings and the spices. But when John saw this, God's Word says, he "believed" [John 20:8]. John must have been pretty smart, [because he figured out] that you cannot get a body out of those wrappings unless it was resurrected or something, so he believed. Then Peter and John departed for home.

Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, is with the other women, and she finally says, "I'm going back to the tomb." She was grieving and smitten with fear. The other women either left to go home in a group or are hanging around there—we don't know for certain. Shortly afterward, though, Mary Magdalene departs. Peter and John are heading back home, and Jesus then appears to the other group of women, minus Mary Magdalene. He appears to them, and He says, "Do not be afraid." They fall down, and they start clinging to His feet. And He says, "Go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me" [Matthew 28:10]. So [the women] head back to tell the disciples what had happened.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene finally arrives at the tomb for the second time. She is just an emotional wreck—not having any sleep, not knowing what has happened, not knowing what to make of the first encounter with the angels. There she sees two angels, again clothed in white, one at each end of where Jesus' body had lain in the tomb. The angels say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" [John 20:13]. After saying this, she turned, and there stood Jesus, but she didn't recognize Him. Maybe she had her head down, maybe her eyes were so full of tears she couldn't recognize who He was, or just didn't look at Him directly—I don't know. But the text says she supposed He was the gardener [see 20:15].

And Jesus spoke, saying, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" To which she replied, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away" [20:15]. And Jesus then called her by name, and said, "Mary!" [20:16]. It was then that Mary

looked directly at Jesus and, seeing it was Him, cried out, “Teacher!” and she just latched onto Him, and clung to Him. And in her mind, [she was thinking,] “Listen, I lost You once. I am *never* letting go of You again!” Then Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and to Your Father, and my God and your God’” [20:17]. So, Mary Magdalene departed the second time from the tomb and reported all of these things to the disciples, saying, “I have seen the Lord” [20:18], and [she] told them everything.

All right. That will give you a little synopsis of everything. Now let’s look at our text in Luke 24:1–12. Follow along as I read:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb [(this is the women)] bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 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? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them [(that is, the apostles,)] as nonsense, and they would not believe them. 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.

Now, you can see from the reading of Luke that not all the details are there. Luke isn't *trying* to give us all the details. But what we learn from Luke's account is that there are two different ways to respond to the resurrection. And how you respond to the resurrection will determine your eternal destiny—your soul—heaven [or] hell, judgment or forgiveness.

The first [thing you should take away from reading this account] is: Do not be unbelieving. As you read Luke's account, the first major point that Luke emphasizes is the fact that [Christ's] closest followers were unbelieving. They were unbelieving! And this in itself is unbelievable. Like many today, they could not bring themselves to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. This is amazing in light of the fact of how many times Jesus told them [that He would rise from the dead]. Jesus had predicted numerous times that He was going to rise from the dead. And, as a matter of fact, when you go through the Gospels, a lot of [instances of Him telling them this] are recorded, but that is just a sampling.

At first, He told them—even the leaders of Israel—in a very cryptic way [that He would rise from the dead]. One of the ironies of this is that when you read the account here, His closest followers don't believe He is risen from the dead, and don't remember what He said, but His enemies do, and then they get the guard posted. But way back in John 2:19–20, the Jews ask for a sign from Jesus, and Jesus said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They looked at Herod's temple and said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you're going to knock it down and rebuild it in three days?” John says that they didn't understand that He was talking about His body. And, if you remember the crucifixion account, they actually used this argument against Him: “He's trying to destroy our temple!”

Matthew 12:38–40 describes the Pharisees coming to Jesus and asking for a sign. The Jews always wanted to see a sign: “Can you do another miracle? We kind of like the miracles.” Jesus said:

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth.

This is also said in Matthew 16:4, right after this—in an almost identical [speech], [Jesus] references Jonah.

Jesus also spoke to the disciples plainly about His impending death and resurrection. In Matthew 16:21 we read: “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must [1]) go to Jerusalem, and [2]) suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and [3]) be killed, and [4]) be raised up on the third day.” That’s clear. And if you remember, right after this, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him, and said, “You are not going to die.” And Jesus had to say, “Get behind me, Satan” [16:23]. In Matthew 17, right after that, in verses 22–23, we read: “And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.’” In Mark 9:32, it gives us a little comment—it’s a parallel account—it says: “But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.” All they knew was, “Jesus is the guy. He fulfills the prophecies, He’s got a lot of power, and He *can’t* die because He’s the one. We know He’s the one. He *cannot* die.”

In Matthew 20:17–19, Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem. He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves on the way, and this is what He said to them. Now, see if this is clear enough:

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will

condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up. [20:18–19]

That's about as clear as you can get. You know what their problem was? They *would not believe*. They just *would not* believe. And this is one of the ways you can respond to Jesus' resurrection: refuse to believe it.

You can understand their reasoning. They have never ever followed anybody or heard of anybody who followed anybody who died and then came back. There's not a precedent here. They're thinking to themselves, "How can He be the Savior, the Messiah, the king, the world-ruler and be dead? Whatever Jesus meant to say, surely it must have been symbolic. It must have been metaphorical of something else, some sort of internal grief or something. But He can't *die*." Yes, it is very interesting that He told the disciples in straightforward language [that] He was going to die and none of them believed Him, and then all the unbelieving leaders said, "Hey, let's get a guard, because He said He was going to rise from the dead."

You see, what Jesus' followers and virtually all of the Jews of that time didn't understand was that when the Messiah showed up, He would show up the first time in humility, as a babe, as a carpenter of poor parents, as a servant of all, to live a perfect life, to offer Himself up as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" [John 1:29]. Jesus said, "No man takes my life from Me. I have the authority to lay it down, I have the authority to raise it up. This authority I receive from the Father" [see John 10:17–18]. He gave Himself willingly, voluntarily. He could have commanded legions of angels—they would have done whatever He asked [see Matthew 26:53]. But He gave Himself for unworthy sinners—for you and for me. But, the death of the Messiah in the mind of a Jew was *not* an option. It did not compute. They couldn't bring themselves to understand that part.

The women who traveled with Jesus and didn't believe, they acted on their unbelief. It's one thing to be unbelieving and [another to] then act it out. The women brought spices to the tomb. Why? If Jesus was not there,

why bring spices to put on Him, [on] His body? See, they believed His body was still going to be there! In Luke 24:2–4, it tells us that when the women didn't find the body, they were "perplexed." Well, they wouldn't have been perplexed if they had believed that Jesus rose from the dead, but they were. Why? Because they didn't believe. And the angels rebuked [them]. If you look in verses 5–7, it shows that [the women] were in a state of unbelief [and] the [angels] said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" [The] implied answer is: That is stupid. Then [the angels] rebuked [the women]: "He is not here, but He has risen" [24:6]. And then [the angels] appealed to the memories of [the women]: "Don't you remember what He told us when He was with us?" Certainly they had known the truth. The angels' statement makes this perfectly clear, so what was the problem? Unbelief. Unbelief.

We see the same response [from] the disciples. Look at Luke 24:11. The women come back, and we don't know in the chronological sequence what this phrase refers to, but anyway, when the disciples finally found out what had happened, their response was, [in] verse 11: "But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them." I mean, even His disciples—the apostles—[didn't believe]? Nope. Even them. "We aren't believing." That is incredible. You know, Jesus told them over and over again—maybe twenty, maybe thirty times, who knows—"I'm going to go to Jerusalem, they're going to kill me, I'm going to be crucified, and rise again on the third day."

[And their response was:] "La la la, we're not going to hear that one." And so, they were not only unbelieving, but they were also acting on their unbelief. Why run to the tomb to see a body that isn't there? Why grieve if Jesus is glorified and now in heaven?

The main sin that runs through this entire text is the sin of unbelief. And it is the *mother* of all sins. Unbelief is the mother of all sins. You know, every sin is an act of unbelief. Every sin is when you say to yourself, "You know what? God doesn't know what's best for me. His Word isn't true. His Word won't bring me happiness, so I'm going to do what I want to do because this

will fulfill me. This will make me happy in the end. Therefore I am going to refuse to believe God and [I'm going to] believe myself instead.”

Do you ever hit your finger with a hammer on purpose? Do you ever put your hand in a fire on purpose? [Or] maybe go outside and put some sand in your eyes and rub it in on purpose? Why [don't you do that]? Because you believe that would be painful. You are convinced it would be painful, and you're not going to try it. But, you know what? If you thought it was good, you'd do it. If you thought it would bring you pleasure, good. If you thought that in the long run, “Hey, you know, sand in the eye is a good thing. Mmmm.” Well, God says all sin hurts, yet we choose to sin and what we're really saying is, “I don't believe God. I don't believe [He] is telling the truth that He knows what's best.” So every sin is just a blatant act of unbelief. And even true believers have to constantly battle against unbelief because we're all sinners.

All unbelief is sin and should be avoided, but the worst kind of unbelief is damning unbelief. You know what? Any sin can send you to hell—any one. I don't care how small. James says if you commit one sin, break one law, you break them all [see James 2:10]. Why is that? Because all of the commands in the Bible are all expressions of “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength” [see Deuteronomy 6:5]. And whenever you choose not to believe God and commit *any* sin, you are violating the one command Jesus said that all the other commands hang on [see Matthew 22:40]. And so, you break one command, you've broken them all, because you know what? You've broken the great command. You've failed to “love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.” And this is your ticket to hell.

But think of all the misery, all the grief, all the fretting, all the anxiety that could have been avoided if Jesus' followers had believed what Jesus said. Oh, it would have been very grievous to see Jesus falsely accused, tortured, and die. But once He was dead, His suffering was ended. You would go home that night, saying, “Hey. Don't bother preparing the body. It's coming up. We've got three days and [then] it's out of here.” And all

day that Sabbath, you could be sitting around, saying, “You know what? It’s going to be so good to see Him again. It’s going to be so great! I wonder what He’s going to look like. I wonder if we’re going to be able to see the injuries or how that works. What does a glorified body look like, anyway?” You could just be anticipating, thinking, “Since Sabbath ends on Saturday night, do you think we should just go to the tomb and wait until He resurrects? Do you think we can watch it?”

You see, that’s what it [would have been] like. They would have had this anticipation—this joy—that Jesus was going to rise from the dead, just like He said—better than new. And Peter would have stepped forward, and maybe some of the others, and told Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, “Don’t go to all that hassle trying to get His body prepared, because He’s coming up.”

I’m certain that there are some of you here this morning who don’t believe. You just don’t believe. Now, you may think to yourself, “Hey, listen. I’m here, aren’t I? I believe in Jesus. That’s why I’ve come to celebrate the resurrection.” Well, you know what? There are two different kinds of belief that the Scriptures teach about. There is Judas’ belief, demon belief, [which] is when you intellectually agree with facts. [It] is when you say, “I am going to give verbal assent to something being true.” Like when you go to the dentist and the dentist [asks], “Have you been flossing?” Now, if I were to say to you, “Do you believe flossing is good for your gums and teeth?” You might tell me, “Yes.” But the question is: “Do you floss?” See, it’s one thing to just agree that something is good, but it’s another thing to trust and live what you say you believe. What it really comes down to is: you live what you believe.

And so, if you say with your mouth, “I believe in Jesus, that He is Lord, He is the Savior, He is the King. His Word is true and I need to follow Him with all of my life, with all of my heart, soul, and strength,” and yet you don’t, what are you really? You are an unbeliever. You are a child of Satan. You are a religious hypocrite, a pretender. If you were to drive home today and get hit by some drunk driver or a meteorite were to fall out of the sky

and crush your car, and you were to stand before Christ, would He say, “Oh! There’s one of my faithful followers, who loved Me, loved my people, and used what I gave him to give Me glory.” Is that what He’s going to say, or is He going to say, “Depart from me, you worker of iniquity, I never knew you” [see Matthew 7:23]?

Oh, you may be able to fool the world that you are a Christian, but you cannot fool Christ. He is the one whose eyes are like a “flame of fire” [Revelation 1:14, 2:18, 19:12]. And, no, you can’t get a lawyer. You can’t hire any professional witnesses. Jesus knows everything already. And He’s right. He doesn’t need to be persuaded, He doesn’t need any information brought to the table. He has all the information about the true condition of your soul. And hell stands with its mouth gaping for you, ready to swallow you into the flames of black darkness forever if you have not repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, believing with saving faith, not an intellectual agreement [that says], “Yeah, I’m willing to say that.”

Don’t think that some intellectual agreement or verbal acknowledgment of Jesus and who He is and what He did is kind of like paying a lifetime fire insurance policy. It’s not. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me” [see John 10:27]. Is that you? Is that *you*? If it’s not, you’re an unbeliever. You are an unbeliever. Satan would have you believe that being religious, wanting to go to heaven, and calling yourself a Christian is enough. But God says, “No. That is just a state of religious unbelief.”

If you are sitting out there, and you’re thinking, “You’re scaring me.” I am *so* glad. You *should* be scared, because God’s wrath abides on all of those—*all of them*—who do not believe in Him [see John 3:36]. It is like a huge, lead weight that is hanging there by a thread, ready to break loose and crush you down into hell forever. And you wonder why Jesus taught on hell so much. Here’s the loving Savior warning, warning, warning: “Flee from the wrath to come” [Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7]. It’s because there are a lot of unbelievers.

Now, you might be sitting out there, going, “OK, Jack. I’m a little bit confused. I know I’m not the best, [most] faithful Christian or maybe I’m

not a Christian, but at least I'm here. It's Easter. I'm saying I believe and doesn't the Bible say all you have to do is believe? OK, maybe I don't have true, saving faith. Maybe I just have intellectual faith. Maybe I'm trusting in my good works or thinking that I'm a little bit better than I am bad, and that's going to weigh [out]." No. Don't even go there. Don't *even* go there. God wants nothing from you to participate in His salvation plan. He wants to save you and have you follow Him. He doesn't want you to follow Him so He saves you.

And so, the solution is [in] our second point: Be believing. Why did the prophets predict the Messiah's death? So you would believe. Why did Jesus predict His death? So you would believe. Why are these accounts in [the Bible] of the angels telling the women, "Don't you remember?" So that *you* would remember. Why did Jesus appear to Mary Magdalene and the other women, to Peter, to the disciples, to more than 500 of the brethren at one time—and they all saw Him? Why did He do that? So you would *believe*. Believe what? Believe that Jesus is risen—risen indeed. That "up from the grave He arose, With a mighty triumph o'er His foes." That "He arose a victor from the dark domain, And He lives forever with the saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!" [from "Christ Arose" by Robert Lowry]. That's why we're here this morning: to celebrate that He is a risen Lord.

Be unbelieving no longer. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, that you have violated the law of God, that you deserve to be judged, and that there is only one escape and that escape is Jesus. You need to believe that God loves you. Oh, He loves you. And right now, His love is extended to you, and He's saying, "Today is the day of salvation." Listen to what Paul says in Romans 5:6–9:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that

while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Think about it: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” [John 3:16] to redeem us from sin, to rescue us from sin so that we would walk in sin no longer. And if you look at your life, and you realize, “You know what? I am in bondage to sin. I am in bondage to my own carnal appetites. I am not in control of my life. I don’t love God. I don’t love God’s people. I don’t love God’s Word. I’m not serving. I’m not a member of this church or any other local church.” Today is the day of salvation. Christ stands there [and] the doors of heaven are opened. And He says, “Come to me and I will give you rest” [see Matthew 11:28]. He says, “Believe in me and I will save you. I will change you.” But if you’re thinking, “Well, can I just get the insurance and still do my own thing?” *No*. No. You come all or you don’t come at all.

Paul, when preaching to the unbelieving Greeks in Athens, said this to them: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed” [Acts 17:30–31]. Do you know who that Man is? He goes on to say, “Having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” [17:31].

When you come here and you celebrate Easter, do you know what you’re celebrating? [You’re celebrating] that the judge is coming back to judge all those who will not believe and follow Him. The door of heaven is open *today*, and today is the day of salvation. Christ will have you now. You don’t need to bring any good works—they aren’t good enough. You don’t need to first get your act cleaned up so that He will accept you—He’ll take you as you are, sinner that you are. Christ died for us “while we were yet sinners” [Romans 5:8], while we were enemies. You don’t need to think to yourself, “OK. Let me get enough of my sins committed. There are still some sins

that I'd like to try first." No. You need to realize that you may not make it to the next sin.

If you're out there thinking, "Well, Jack, I'll wait until I'm on my deathbed, and then I'll sneak in under the wire and just give Him everything. I'll give Him all of my thirty seconds of life [that I have] left." You don't even know when you're going to die. You don't know if you're going to be one of those people who dies suddenly of a brain aneurism or [from] a car accident. Most people aren't conscious when they die. You may be just swept away. [My] neighbor was telling me that his brother just died suddenly of a heart attack. Another neighbor told me that, "Yeah, [my mom] had cancer and as soon as they found it, she just died the next day." That may be you. That may be you.

And so, you need to take the advice of the psalmist who says, "Do homage to the Son, that He might not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him" [Psalm 2:12]. Believe in Jesus. Believe in the resurrection. Give your life to Him *right now* and you will be saved. And for the rest of you, just remember: He is risen, and all God's people say, "He is risen indeed." Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful for this text and [for] being able to survey all of the Gospels at one time to get a very clear picture of what might have happened, [of] the chronological sequence of events that led up to the resurrection, and to follow the resurrection of Christ. Father, if there [are people] here, right now, whose hearts are troubled within them and they know they need to be saved, that they aren't living for you, and they are battling within and Satan is telling them to wait, wait, wait, may they *now* come to You. May You grant them repentance, may You open their hearts, may they give their lives to you and be changed forevermore. May You put your Spirit within them, [and] give them the hope of eternal life, and help them know for certain that they are going to heaven. And give them that desire to follow You all the rest of their days with whole hearts and willing minds. And, for the rest of us, may we leave here today praising You that You are coming back in

judgment, that You can raise us from the dead, for You have furnished proof, having first raised Your own Son from the dead. We praise You for that, in Christ's name, Amen.

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