

FBC Easter Sunday Service March 31, 2024, Then Came the Morning Luke 24:1-12

Intro: The Bible has a lot to say about mornings. Our Saviour prayed early in the morning.

Joshua is pictured as a man who rose up early in the morning.

Abraham had an early morning start when he took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah.

What a morning it was for Jacob when he awoke from sleep and set up a pillar of stones in honour of God at Bethel.

It must have been a glorious morning for Daniel when the first rays of sunshine lit up the city of Babylon after that night in the lion's den.

Imagine how beautiful was the morning for the disciples after they spent that terrible night on the Sea of Galilee in that storm.

Yes, all of these were great mornings. However, none of them can compare to that great morning when our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, conquered death, Hell and the grave.

There was never a morning like that before, nor will there ever be one like it again.

Oh, what a morning it was this resurrection Sunday!

What a morning it was when Jesus pulled the stinger from death and gave life eternal to all those who will place their faith in Him.

The repercussions of that morning reach down to this very day. The tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive.

Today is Easter Sunday, and we have spent the last several weeks following Jesus and his disciples on the road to Jerusalem. Last week we witnessed Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But a lot happened in that one week between Palm Sunday and Easter.

On Monday and Tuesday, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders escalated.

On Wednesday, Judas met with the religious leaders and arranged for Jesus' betrayal.

On Thursday, Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room and shared the Last Supper with them.

Later that same night he was arrested while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Early Friday morning Jesus was tried before Pilate and sentenced to death. By Friday evening Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. Saturday was a Sabbath day of rest.

And so, at last we come to Sunday morning. So much had happened since the triumphal entry.

The disciples were now in shock and mourning over the death of their Lord and friend. And they were hiding in fear for their own lives.

But now Sunday morning had arrived, and everything was about to change.

Verse 1: *“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.”*

On Good Friday, right after Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea received permission to bury Christ’s body in his own tomb. I heard the story that Joseph was asked, “why on earth would a wealthy man like you, allow a lowly carpenter to be buried in your personal tomb.

To which Joseph answered, **“that’s OK, it was just for the weekend.”**

Now it was Sunday morning, and the women out of love and respect for their crucified Lord, were going to anoint his body in the grave. They took spices they had prepared, and went to the tomb.

Luke tells us it was very early in the morning. They went fully expecting to find Jesus dead and buried in the tomb.

Instead, we read in verses 2-3: *“They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”* **I like that. They found the stone rolled away, but they did not find Jesus.**

And that brings us to the good news of Easter. (4-8)

Take a listen: *“While the women were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.”*

These were clearly not ordinary men. They appeared out of nowhere. Their clothes were shining like lightning. The other gospels confirm to us that these were indeed angels.

Now I have never met an angel – at least not knowingly; angels have been known to travel in disguise. But in the Bible whenever an angel appears in glory, **one thing always happens.** People fall down on their faces in fear. It’s an instinctive reaction.

Angels are majestic and glorious beings, and we fall down before them. The women at the tomb were no different. In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.

The angels asked the women: *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”*

Then they remembered his words. (Luke 24:5-8)

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5)

That’s the question the angels posed to the women who came to Jesus’ tomb that first Easter morning.

They were looking for Jesus among the dead, and they did not find him.

Many people are still looking for Jesus among the dead.

I think of biblical scholars who study the words of Jesus and the gospel manuscripts but don't believe in Christ's resurrection.

I think of the archaeologists who two thousand years later are still trying to find Jesus' body and bones in the tomb but keep coming up empty.

I think of people who finger the molded body of Christ on their crucifixes but don't know the reality of the living Christ.

These people all have one thing in common. **They are all looking for Jesus among the dead.** But if you're looking for Jesus among the dead, you'll never find him. Because he's not there.

I remember many years ago, hearing the story of a man called Frank Morison, who went looking for Jesus among the dead. Morison was a British journalist who lived in the early twentieth century.

He was not a Christian. He was a skeptic who felt that these stories about Jesus were nothing more than a myth or legend, especially the story of the resurrection.

So Morison had a brilliant idea. **Why not prove that the resurrection never happened?** Why not use his own research skills as a journalist to dig into history and prove that Jesus never rose from the dead?

He would do his research, and then he would write a book presenting the historical facts about Christ and the events surrounding his death. And so Frank Morison went looking for Jesus among the dead.

And you know what? He never found him. What he did find is exactly what Luke says in our passage this morning. **He found the stone rolled away, but he did not find the body of Jesus.**

Instead, he found the risen Christ, and he put his faith in him as Lord and Saviour.

Morison wrote up his research in a famous book called, Who Moved the Stone?

He set out to write a book disproving the resurrection of Christ. Instead, he ended up writing what has become a Christian classic presenting the evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

Morison went looking for Jesus among the dead. But he didn't find him there. And you'll not find him there either. If you want to find Jesus this morning, you can't go looking among the dead. You must go looking among the living!

What a shocking response from the disciples when the women told them what they had seen and heard.

"They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."

Can this be true, the very apostles doubting Jesus' resurrection? **Wow!** The very men who had been with Jesus 24/7 for three years now doubting. It begs the question!

Can a person who calls himself a Christian ever doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

What does the Bible say? I must admit I always thought the answer was a resounding No, until one sunny afternoon working with a bricklayer repairing our chimney – **broaden.**

Here the disciples of Jesus say it is all nonsense. Of course. No one rises from the dead.

Not after three days. Not after being beaten and scourged. Not after being crucified. Not after hanging on a cross for six hours. Not after having a spear thrust in your side.

Not after being covered with over many pounds of spices and wrapped in a suffocating burial cloth. Not after being sealed in a tomb.

No. The odds are against it. It's impossible.

And Mark says, "When they heard that Jesus was alive ... they did not believe it." (Mark 16:11)

We all know the rest of the story. That those who knew Jesus best and loved him most had grave doubts.

They could not and would not believe it.

They believed him to be dead, and they did not expect him to rise again from the dead.

"For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." (John 20:9)

The people who knew Jesus best and loved him the most had sober doubts that Sunday morning and did not expect a resurrection.

What finally convinced them? Jesus did! The tomb was empty ... the angel said he had risen ... all that could be explained. But then Jesus himself appeared to them ... alive from the dead.

The same Jesus ... the one they had watched die ... he appeared, and they saw him, talked to him, touched him, heard his voice, looked into his face, watched him closely. **Against all their expectations, the truth came home to them ... Jesus had risen from the dead!**

And that brings us back to our original question: Can a person who calls himself a Christian ever doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ? **Yes indeed, for the ones who knew him best and loved him most doubted at the first.**

Written in a Lutheran church bulletin were some striking words. They said, "**The tomb is empty ... No bones about it.**" That sums up it, doesn't it?

For if we go to the tombs of the founders of the great world religions. Call the roll:

Mohammed "Here"

Buddha "Here"

Confucius "Here"

Moses "Here"

Jesus Christ

No answer ... Because he is not there. The tomb is empty!!! Doubt if you will, but the tomb is still empty because he's not there. He is risen, just as he said.

In the early church, Christians greeted each other this way: One would say, “He is risen.” Another would answer, “He is risen indeed.”

Can a person who calls himself a Christian ever doubt the resurrection? The answer must be **Yes**, for the ones who knew him best and loved him most doubted at the first.

This past week I read 1 Corinthians 15, that famous passage where Paul reasons out loud about the resurrection and the implications if it did not happen. “*since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?*”

Paul answers by saying, “That’s foolish because if Christians don’t rise from the dead, what you’re really saying is that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, because those two things go together—**his resurrection and ours.**”

Then he says it twice: “*If Christ has not been raised.*” (I Corinthians 15:14,17) So what, Paul?

1. Our preaching is vain. (14)
2. We are despicable liars. (15)
3. Our faith is vain. (17)
4. We are still in our sins. (17)
5. Dead Christians have perished. (18)
6. We are to be pitied more than all men. (19)

Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection. Once disprove it, and you have disposed of Christianity.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.

In our society there are two great religious holidays—Christmas and Easter. For many of us Christmas is the bigger and greater season of the year.

Easter? For most people it’s just another long weekend, another chance to get away for a few days.

Somehow, we’ve gotten our thinking badly mixed up.

If Easter had not happened, Christmas would have no meaning.

If the tomb is not empty, the cradle makes no difference. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then he really is just a misguided Jewish rabbi with delusions of grandeur.

If Easter is not true, then Christmas is only the story of an obscure baby born in an out-of-the-way village in a forgotten land 2000 years ago. **It’s Easter that gives Christmas its meaning.**

You want proof? Although we believe fervently the virgin birth of Christ, **only two gospels say anything about it**

But the resurrection? That's a different story. In every part of the New Testament, it comes up again and again. All four gospels agree on this fact.

When the first Christians preached, they didn't mention Bethlehem; they talked about the empty tomb. They never got over the fact that on Easter Sunday when they went to the tomb, Jesus was gone.

The resurrection is the central fact of our faith. Disprove it and nothing is left.

That's why from the very beginning, skeptics and doubters have attacked the Christian faith at this very point. It's not the virgin birth, it's not the miracles, it's not his death. The resurrection is the touchstone.

This is the heart of what we are all about. Everything we do rests on this fact—Jesus rose from the dead.

You can doubt some miracle of Christ if you want and the only loser will be you ... but if you doubt the resurrection of Jesus, the foundations begin to crumble.

Folks, that's the good news of Easter. Jesus Christ is alive. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Oh, what a morning!