

Jesus!
“The Resurrection of Jesus, I”
Luke 24:1-12

Take a first look.

I. **“Rum thing, all that talk of Frazier’s about the dying God. It looks as if it really happened once.”¹ These were the words spoken to C. S. Lewis by the man whom he called “the most hard-boiled atheist” he knew.** That short conversation in Lewis’s rooms at Oxford University shook his unbelief. Lewis at that time was a new teacher of Medieval and Renaissance Literature in the Magdalen College of Oxford University. His disbelief in the historical fact-claims of the Christian message was secure, or so he thought. When he was faced with a doubter’s serious doubt of his doubt, it shook him. This moved him one step closer to his conversion, but he had not made it quite there yet.

II. MAKE NO MISTAKE TODAY, MY FRIENDS. The Christian message is not just another “way” among ways. Jesus presents Himself to the world as “*the way and the truth and the life*” (cf. John 14:6). Scandalous! Precisely. And until we come to terms with the scandal of Jesus Christ, we haven’t understood the story very well. How could this man from ancient Galilee make such a claim? How could He take upon Himself the worship that is due to God alone without even flinching? How could He have the audacity to forgive the sins of other human beings? How can or how did He back up such claims? He did so in His resurrection.

III. PAUL WAS RIGHT. The only basis of our faith that is sound, the only anchor for all other Christian teaching is found right here (1 Corinthians 15:12-14, NIV): ¹² *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* ¹³ *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* ¹⁴ *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.* This is a powerful and foundational passage. Christ’s resurrection is nothing short of the heart of the matter. This is what verifies and supports His claim to be the Savior of the world. This is what makes the cross of Christ the means of that salvation, rather than simply a tragic and often-repeated human story of injustice and political intrigue. He is risen! (He is risen, indeed!), and this makes all the difference in the world and beyond the world.

Luke makes this clear as he brings the greatest story in the world to its moment of climax.

Take a closer look at Luke 24:1-12.

I. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS HISTORICALLY VERIFIABLE.

1. *The women of faith who had watched Jesus’ crucifixion came to the tomb early on Sunday morning and found the stone rolled away.* This was no small stone. The tomb was cut out of solid rock, and so the stone itself was most likely about four feet in diameter. This would make its weight so great that even a cluster of women would be unable to remove it. Actual tombs that have been excavated in the same area show a large flat and rounded stone nearly a foot thick and 3-4 feet in diameter rolled slightly downhill into place at the entrance to such tombs. Once placed, they were not meant to be removed. Clearly, the absence of the rock would be a point of amazement to them.

2. *Two men “in clothes that gleamed like lightning” (NIV) told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as He had told them.* We are surely meant to infer from this reserved description that these were angels. The same description of the gleaming clothing is used of the vision on the mountain where Jesus was “transfigured” and where He met with Moses and Elijah (see Luke 9). This factors into the

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1955), pp. 223-24.

historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. The women (and the rest of the disciples for that matter) had forgotten the words of Jesus that had foretold the events that had now occurred. He had clearly told them more than once that He was going up to Jerusalem to be falsely accused, arrested, mistreated, and crucified. He also told them that on the third day He would be raised to life again from the dead. The whole concept went right over their heads. They missed the entire point, until it all happened and they were reminded of His words. He was unjustly condemned; He was crucified; He was raised from the dead! He is risen! The angels appeared to confirm this truth to the women.

Insight: Jesus' resurrection is presented to the world as an historical event not as a spiritual metaphor.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just a symbolic (but fictional) tale made up to give us a spirit of hope. Our hope is only secure and realistic because it is based on the truth of His *physical* resurrection. If He was not raised from the dead, our faith is founded on fiction and it only has some poetical and subjective meaning. However, if He truly was raised from the dead, our faith is based on the most remarkable historical event of all time.

I—What difference does this make in light of the two funeral services we have had in the past week? It makes every difference! Because He lives, we can face the prospect of our own certain deaths without despair. We know that we will live with Him in Paradise when we die. We know that the resurrection of all is coming. We know that we will live in a “new heaven and a new earth” where righteousness dwells. Why? Because Jesus lives!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian martyr in Nazi Germany, hanged as an act of spite by the head of the Gestapo just two weeks before the fall of Berlin in 1945, knew this truth both from his Bible and from his impending experience. He wrote these words not too long before his death: “Socrates mastered the art of dying; Christ overcame death as ‘the last enemy’ (1 Cor. 15:26). There is a real difference between the two things; the one is within the scope of human possibilities, the other means resurrection. It’s not from *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, but from the resurrection of Christ, that a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world. ... If a few people really believed that and acted on it in their daily lives, a great deal would be changed. To live in the light of the resurrection—that is what Easter means.”²

3. *The women reported all of this to the Eleven and the other disciples.* What would we have done? If we had received firsthand information that confirmed that the most wonderful event of all time had happened, would we keep it to ourselves? None of us would. I wonder if these women stopped to calculate whether the other disciples would believe them? Do you think they even thought of that? Could it be that they were so caught up in the great news they had received that they simply and directly passed it on?

Insight: This story is so great that it must be told!

I—Yet, there are those who have never had to grapple with this story, because they have never heard it. Ken Taylor, translator of *The Living Bible, Paraphrase*, has told, “A missionary friend of mine serves in a restricted access country. For many years the government of this country has taught the people that there is no God. My friend had the opportunity to interact on a regular basis with a nonbeliever of that country who is a highly educated professional.

“After developing a friendship with the professional, my friend had the opportunity to share the gospel story with him. My friend was taken aback by the man’s response: ‘What you have told me cannot be true. If it were true, it is such good news that someone would have told this to me before.’”³

There is some validity to his point, isn’t there? There have been so many political, social, and

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Martyred Christian. Christianity Today*, Vol. 40, no. 4.

³ Ken Taylor, quoted in “To Illustrate,” *Leadership*, Vol. 21, no. 4, (Fall 2000).

religious obstacles that have worked against the advanced of the gospel, that it hasn't yet reached every person in the world. What is keeping this generation of Christians from reaching every person in the world with the message of Jesus Christ? Religion, politics, and social issues. But many Christians are praying and seeking to get the word out, sooner or later, to everyone. Will we offer ourselves to God for this eternal purpose, both through persevering prayer and direct action?

II. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS EASILY DISBELIEVED.

1. *The disciples just could not believe the story of the women.* "Their words seemed to them like nonsense" (v. 11, NIV). In a sense, not only the resurrection of Jesus, but the message of the Good News based on His death and resurrection, is seemingly too good to be true. Here perhaps the women faced something they were accustomed to experiencing in their society. No one believed their report *because they were women*.

Now Jesus had both taught and modeled a different attitude and manner toward women. He had saved and changed some of the worst of women. A couple of those saved and transformed women were the ones giving this report, notably Mary Magdalene. She had been a woman with a reputation before Jesus had cleansed and transformed her (see Luke 8:2). The woman of Samaria that Jesus had met beside the well of Sychar was also one such woman (see John 4). When she bore witness to a changed life, the whole community came out to see for themselves. Maybe the disciples were just unable within their cultural setting to believe that women, and *these* women besides, had received such direct experience and information before they had.

Of course, these other disciples may not have believed because of the fantastical nature of the message. They had all seen Jesus die, remember? And it seems that they were completely opaque in understanding Jesus' teaching about the resurrection. Whatever the case, they just could not believe what the women had told them.

2. *Peter went to investigate the story for himself, and he marveled at what he saw that confirmed the women's report.* We must give Peter some credit here. Even though he had denied even knowing Jesus on the night of Jesus' arrest, now he "got up and ran to the tomb" (v. 12, NIV). He seemed to have serious remorse after denying the Lord Jesus, and now he could not wait to find out if He were really alive. He looked for himself into the empty tomb and saw the burial clothes of Jesus lying there.

Insight: Jesus' resurrection is the most fantastical tale ever told, and so every person who hears it should investigate it with diligence.

I—It is too easy to think that our lives and our world view are all together and secure and satisfying, when we know in our hearts that it just is not so. Actress Winona Rider learned this by experience. At the peak of her young success story, she found herself lonelier and emptier than ever. Here is how she reported it. "When I was 18, I was driving around at two in the morning, completely crying and alone and scared. I drove by this magazine stand that had this *Rolling Stone* that I was on the cover of, and it said, 'Winona Ryder: The Luckiest Girl in the World.' And there I was feeling more alone than I ever had."⁴ Could this be some of us today? Perhaps it looks like we have it all together, but we know better, don't we?

I—Not only is the resurrection itself a watershed event in the history of the world, but the message that it confirms is just the same. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus means to believe in the story that it makes true, that goes like this. God created humanity in order to share with people the overflow of His love. Humanity decided and continues to decide to go its own way instead, bringing alienation between God and His creatures as well as alienation between people. This sin, this willing avoidance of

⁴ Winona Ryder, cited from *Plugged In*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (April 2001); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky.

God's will and purpose, continues to separate people from God. It will destine them to hell if they persist in such hardness of heart.

But God has done one thing that has both satisfied His justice and righteousness and at the same time expressed His love for every human being. He has sent His Son into the world to provide a perfect satisfaction of God's just wrath against sin and human self-will. Jesus lived a perfect human life, without sin in any way, and died in place of every person, taking the punishment for the sins of the world upon Himself at the cross. Then He was raised from the dead on the third day to deliver humanity from the effects of sin: separation from God, death, and hell.

Now when we place faith in Jesus Christ, we receive forgiveness of sins, the indwelling presence of God's Spirit to enable us to live better, and the promise of eternal life, which begins the moment we trust in Christ and which is made complete in the life to come. None of us can earn this life; it is offered as a gift of transforming grace. When received, it begins to change our desires, from self-centered to God-centered and others-focused. This is almost too good to be true, except that it is! The resurrection of Jesus Christ confirms it once and for all. Can you believe that God loves each of us, with all our weaknesses and failures, like that?!

Lee Strobel tells this story: "Shortly after the Korean War, a Korean woman had an affair with an American soldier, and she got pregnant. He went back to the United States, and she never saw him again. She gave birth to a little girl, and this little girl looked different than the other Korean children. She had light-colored, curly hair. In that culture, children of mixed race were ostracized by the community. In fact, many women would kill their children because they didn't want them to face such rejection.

"But this woman didn't do that. She tried to raise her little girl as best she could. For seven years she tried to do that, until the rejection was too much. She did something that probably nobody in this room could imagine ever doing. She abandoned her little girl to the streets.

"This little girl was ruthlessly taunted by people. They called her the ugliest word in the Korean language, *tookki*, alien devil. It didn't take long for this little girl to draw conclusions about herself based on the way people treated her.

"For two years she lived in the streets, until finally she made her way to an orphanage. One day, word came that a couple from America was going to adopt a little boy. All the children in the orphanage got excited, because at least one little boy was going to have hope. He was going to have a family. So this little girl spent the day cleaning up the little boys—giving them baths and combing their hair—and wondering which one would be adopted by the American couple.

"The next day the couple came, and this is what the girl recalled: 'It was like Goliath had come back to life. I saw the man with his huge hands lift up each and every baby. I knew he loved every one of them as if they were his own. I saw tears running down his face, and I knew if they could, they would have taken the whole lot home with them.

"He saw me out of the corner of his eye. Now let me tell you. I was nine years old, but I didn't even weigh 30 pounds. I was a scrawny thing. I had worms in my body. I had lice in my hair. I had boils all over me. I was full of scars. I was not a pretty sight. But the man came over to me, and he began rattling away something in English, and I looked up at him. Then he took this huge hand and laid it on my face. What was he saying? He was saying, "I want this child. This is the child for me."⁵

Take it home (applications).

I. This is the truth confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has offered to take us, even us!, as His own if we will simply trust Him.

II. Have each of us responded to this amazing love and grace? Will we today?

1. A—Admit we have sinned.

2. B—Believe in the Good News. Invite Christ into our lives by faith.

3. C—Confess faith in Jesus Christ through baptism and membership in the local church. Continue to confess our faith in the way we live and the choices we make.

⁵ Lee Strobel, "Meet the Jesus I Know," *Preaching Today* Audio #211.