

**INTRO:**

Ah what a great song...As you know, at this time we typically enjoy Communion together. But this evening we're gonna forgo that BECAUSE I want us to have sufficient time for BOTH unpacking our passage tonight AND being able to pray together AFTER our study of the Scripture...So if ya have a Bible and I hope ya do, go ahead and make your way to the *Gospel of Luke Ch.24*. And before we read, I want you to think about a time when you experienced something you felt was almost, ***"too good be to true."*** And I'll give ya a moment, but just a time when you almost couldn't believe something happened that did happen. Take a second... (PAUSE)...Ok. Would anybody willing to share your experience?...Thanks...So the reason I asked you to think about a time that felt ***"too good be to true"*** is BECAUSE our text this evening details, perhaps, the MOST "too good to be true" of all events - and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. SO...let's hear the reading of God's word together. And as we do, I want you to be paying attention to just the sense of wonder that pervades this passage. Ok? Let's follow along together... **Jennie** Reads...

**TEXT:**

Thanks **Jennie**...In his first letter to the *Corinthians*,<sup>1</sup> the Apostle Paul said that if Jesus Christ has not resurrected, then Christianity is essentially meaningless, which is IN-PART WHY each of the four Gospels includes an account OF Jesus' resurrection. For our purposes tonight we're obviously looking at Luke's account BECAUSE, as I shared with you last week, Luke is concerned about presenting the raw facts of Jesus' life and ministry. As he says in *ch. 1 vv.3-4*, he wanted to *"write an orderly account,"* so that those to whom he was writing would, quote, *"have certainty concerning"* the things of Christ. And so it's appropriate that for something like the resurrection, we consider a source concerned about simply giving us the facts. AND YET, that doesn't mean Luke's facts are devoid of wonder and amazement. Quite the opposite. Everything about this text shows a kind of "too-good-to-be-true" wonder. Look starting in *vv.1-3*. We're told that a group of ladies - *v.8* says *Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women* - arrived at Jesus' tomb EXPECTING to find His body, but INSTEAD finding an empty grave. The resurrection begins with a group of ladies, who weren't expecting a resurrection. As one person says, *"these weren't starry-eyed, gullible, miracle-seekers, showing up with, ya know, lawn chairs and 'Jesus-Is-Alive' paraphernalia."*<sup>2</sup> No! These are ladies expecting to find a corpse. **How do ya know?** They showed up with, as Luke says, *"spices they'd prepared."* Before modern day embalming methods, spices were used to preserve bodies. This is a group of women, who'd not only spent resources, but time preparing spices in expectation of anointing a dead body...So it's no wonder as *v.4* says, *"they were perplexed"* when they DIDN'T find a body. And that word "perplexed"; it doesn't mean "hmm, I think we oughta consider these things." No! it literally means they *"were at a loss/in a confused state of mind."*<sup>3</sup>...which was then no-doubt heightened by the appearance of, as it says, two men in *"dazzling apparel."* And I love that, because if these are angels, of course, they're gonna be dazzling. But it's almost like Luke

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19

<sup>2</sup> "It Seems Like Nonsense... But Is It?" // Luke 24:1-12 // In Step #20 - J.D. Greear

<sup>3</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 119.

doesn't know what to say and includes this detail, which isn't particularly germane to the story, to just be like, "*Yo! You weren't there. So Ima upload this on the gram, but these guys were dope.*" "Dazzling" literally means "flashy"<sup>4</sup> - Met Gala style...Just again the wonder of it all.

So these angels tell the ladies, "*Yo, Jesus ain't here! He's risen just like He said He would.*" And then look in **v.8**. It says, "*And they remembered His words*" - that's Jesus words! It's like in great movies, where you go through the whole thing and you get all these different details and what appears to be parallel stories and characters UNTIL at that climactic scene something weaves all of it together so that you're left going, "*Ah no way!*" right? That's what's happening here. It's like it's all coming together for these ladies. Jesus' resurrection is this kinda light-bulb moment that's suddenly giving meaning and clarity to everything He'd said and done before.

And so needless to say, they rush off and report to the other disciples what they've experienced. Now, I have to point out the significance of God choosing women to be the first ones to testify to the resurrection here. Cuz see in the 1st century, sadly, the testimony of a woman wasn't considered valid evidence. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that even the witness of MULTIPLE women wasn't acceptable. Women weren't considered credible sources. So the question is: If Luke is making up a resurrection story here, why would he make women the first witnesses?...He wouldn't...because he's not making it up. This is just what happened and he's simply reporting it in all it's "too-good-to-be-true'ness"...And clearly it DID seem too-good-to-be-true, because **v.II** says that the ladies' report "*seemed (to the disciples) like an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*" I think sometimes we read ancient texts like this and think that people back then were way more prone to believing in myths and fairy-tales, because of course, they didn't have the science we have. But you gotta understand, folks like these ladies/these disciples, they knew how death worked. I would say better than most of us, cuz by the time you were like 10 you'd likely have seen more dead bodies up close than you and I will see in a lifetime. Not to mention, they'd literally watched Jesus hang from a cross. Primitive or not, they knew, you don't come back from that.<sup>5</sup> And to think otherwise would be "*an idle tale*"/too-good-to-be-true!... And YET...maybe it is true...which is why in **v.I2**, Peter rushes to the tomb to see for himself!

This whole account is just REplete with wonder and amazement, not only because of the miraculous nature of, as N.T. Wright calls it, "*this most explosive and subversive of events,*"<sup>6</sup> but because of the implications OF this event. Cuz see Friends, if the resurrection is true then it means at least 3 things are also true with it. 3 Things: **First**, If the Resurrection Is True: **You and I Have A New Identity**: You know what an identity is? It's the steady sense of who you are. Now unfortunately, most of our identities tend to have a hidden mantra within em that goes something like: "*I am what I eat.*" Or "*I am what I achieve, or what I wear, what I look like, or where I come from.*" Sometimes it's the reverse. "*I am what I've failed at, what I don't look like,*

<sup>4</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>5</sup> Explanation of validity of Luke's account and death adapted from "It Seems Like Nonsense... But Is It?" // Luke 24:1-12 // In Step #20 - J.D. Greear

<sup>6</sup> NT Wright: The Resurrection of the Son of God

*or don't wear.*" Regardless, many of our identities come from what we do or don't do.<sup>7</sup> BUT if the resurrection is true, you understand, then you and I get an identity not based on what we DO, but based on what Christ has DONE. **Romans 4:23-25** says it this way: *"But the words 'it was counted to (Abraham as righteousness)' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It'll be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."* **You see that?** When God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, it was a demonstration that He'd accepted Jesus' death as full payment for our sin. So that NOW for those who are IN Jesus/BELIEVE as it says that God resurrected Jesus; God sees you as *"righteous,"* which is to say, you have His approval!<sup>8</sup>

I love the way one old Puritan said it: *"If Christ were not risen, it would be evidence that God was not yet satisfied for (our) sins. (But) the resurrection IS God declaring His satisfaction."*<sup>9</sup> God satisfied with you...WHICH MEANS...you no longer need to keep striving to make yourself satisfactory. You're defined by GOD'S success over your sin NOT by the rise and fall of YOUR success. So you can be transparent about your failure/you should - precisely BECAUSE you're not defined by it anymore...And I'll tell ya, I've found a lot of freedom in this recently. Actually journaled the following this week, *"I've realized that I've come to believe that I'm not good enough but have never wanted to admit it. And the truth is...I'm not! I'm not always a particularly good Pastor. By many accounts an unsuccessful church planter. I've made a mess of my marriage at times. I've not always been understanding with my girls. I don't usually have many actual answers to things, but like to think I do. And I'm pretty sure I like sports and candy too much. But I do know Jesus loves and is satisfied with me."*...Friend, I hope you can, not only, SAY the same, but know the freedom that comes from being able to SAY the same!...**Where are you feeling less-than, ashamed, insecure, like you've not lived-up this evening?** God wants you to hear two things in that tonight: **One**, It doesn't define you. And **Two**, even if it did/HIS opinion of you - the only opinion that actually counts - is one of complete and total satisfaction! *If the Resurrection Is True: **You and I Have A New Identity***

**Two**, If the Resurrection Is True: **You and I Have A New Power**: Listen to what **Ephesians 2:5-6** says: *"Even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us ALIVE together with Christ...and RAISED us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places..."* You know what it means to be *"raised up and seated with Christ?"* It means to be with Him and have Him with you. So what Paul's saying is that BECAUSE God the Father resurrected Jesus, YOU who are IN Jesus can be assured that you'll always be WITH Jesus! In other words, because of the resurrection, you'll never be abandoned BY Jesus!...And here's why I say that leads to a new **power**:<sup>10</sup> You ever wondered why God didn't just raise Jesus from the dead immediately? Like why have Him die on a Friday but not get raised until Sunday morning? Is that just God being overly dramatic?...I think in part, it's because that time gap/Friday to Sunday is a METAPHOR

<sup>7</sup> Understanding of identity adapted from "What Difference Does the Resurrection Make" - Jonathan Dodson, Brad Watson

<sup>8</sup> Explanation adapted from ESV+

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Edwards: *Miscellanies*, Vol. 13, 227).

<sup>10</sup> This section on power personalized but adapted in large-part from insights in "It Seems Like Nonsense... But Is It?" // Luke 24:1-12 // In Step #20 - J.D. Greear

for what life sometimes feels like now... Ya know, those seasons and situations in which you wonder, *“Where IS God? What in the world is He doing. Has He forgotten about me? Did I do something wrong? Is He punishing me? Why isn't He answering my prayers? ...Has He abandoned me?”* And the answer of course is No! Because even if you feel like you're living in a “Friday or Saturday season of life,” God wants you to know that Sunday's coming. Friend, if God did not abandon you when your sin literally crucified his Son, you can be sure He's not going to abandon you now. And if you really understand that, that gives you real **power** to deal with whatever comes your way. Cuz we all know this: When you're in pain/afraid/confused; you need more than just truisms about everything working out for good. You need the presence of a Savior who's been through the pain/through the fear, and come out on the other side. You need the presence of One, who knows what it feels like to lose a child, be betrayed by friends, unjustly condemned and canceled, alienated from His Father, and still come out on top! THAT'S what gives you **power** to not be overcome and to never quit! ***You and I Have A New Power.***

***Third and Finally,*** If the Resurrection Is True: **You and I Have A New Purpose:** ***Matthew 28:18-20*** details what's called the Great Commission. It's the dominant marching orders, if you will, BECAUSE OF the resurrection. Jesus Himself, AFTER resurrecting appeared to His Disciples and CO-missioned them/gave them/US a joint-**purpose** of spending our lives to help those around us trust Jesus! As Jesus said, *“Go therefore and make disciples”* - the word “disciple” literally means a learner/one who's learning to trust and rest in Christ for everything... Because Jesus is alive you understand, WE who've received new life IN Jesus: New **Identity**/ New **Power** - have been commissioned to invite others to receive the same and thereby join-in on Jesus' redemptive agenda. That's why as Spurgeon said, you can't in any meaningful way call yourself a Christ-follower and NOT be inviting others to follow Christ with you. Part of being a disciple of the resurrected Jesus is/according to the Great Commission, MAKING disciples - or better said, pointing people to Jesus who makes disciples... And I'll tell ya/two things here: **One**, when God called me into vocational ministry, it was through this! I couldn't escape the reality that the resurrection means that people's deepest need isn't legal, political or otherwise. It's RECEIVING new life in Christ. Moreover, I couldn't escape the reality that the resurrection means that Jesus IS going to re-make a world free from sin and death, whether I joined-in or not. And I just didn't wanna regret...not!

But **Two**, here's the thing: That was just me. Nowhere in the Great Commission does Jesus say, “this is ONLY for those in vocational ministry.” Actually the opposite. He says, *“As YOU are going...”* - throughout your daily rhythms and routines/your norms and networks... *“make disciples by baptizing,”* meaning by inviting people to trust and rest in Him/helping em be immersed/baptized into a sense of who Jesus is and what He's like. And THEN *“teaching em to obey all that I've commanded,”* which is to say, setting aside time to instruct and be instructed from the Scriptures, so that we know HOW to trust and rest in Christ... Incidentally, this why we ask one another to commit to what we call a cadence of **Going, Connecting** and **Pausing - Going** throughout our daily rhythms and routines together, just prayerfully seeking out each other and neighbors as friends... THEN as you have opportunity, **Connecting** with those who are receptive/like within a Missional Family Meeting context, in hopes pointing em to Jesus/bringing the

truths and promises of Jesus to bear on the everyday stuff of life...And THEN just consistently setting aside time like this to ***Pause*** together, in order to meet WITH and hear FROM Jesus, as He sends us out AGAIN to participate in His redemptive agenda. ***You see?*** If the Resurrection Is True: ***You and I Have A New Purpose.*** And not just a new purpose in addition to other purposes, but a new purpose that oughta color/flavor/streamline/inform/define and direct every other purpose. Cuz in the news of a resurrected Savior, we don't just have what's believable. We have what's desirable. Not just what's needed, but what's wanted for a new identity, new power and new purpose. And our job, is to, every day, bear witness to that in everything! ***Amen?...Let's Pray***