

INTRODUCTION

EXPOSITION

I. THE WOMEN'S ARRIVAL AT THE TOMB – vv.1-3

- Jesus is crucified on Friday, and is put into the tomb as the evening comes. The women see where His body is lain, and return to their dwellings. They rest the entirety of the Jewish Sabbath, that Saturday.
- Luke introduces this section with a phrase that identifies the time of the women's visit is "the first day of the week." In the Greek, it is literally "the first of the Sabbaths." This term in the Greek comes to be synonymous with "a week" Luke 18:12. This phrase is used in all four Gospels as descriptive of the day in which the Lord's tomb was found empty.
- It was on the first day, very early in that morning that the women arrive. It is so early, John tells us that it was still dark. They will get in at the soonest point possible in order to honor the Lord Jesus by caring for His body which, they think, is still in the tomb.
- "They", that is the women who followed Him all the way from Galilee (23:55), as well as some other women, come to the tomb bringing spices which they had prepared. The idea behind this, before the days of modern embalming, is to provide sufficient spices and oils that the smell of the decomposing body would not become overwhelming to any who pass by.
- What they were expecting to find when they got there after this amount of time would be horrible, and hard for most of us to deal with. Yet, they were ready to come and show their respect to Him in this way.
- We remember that this had been Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb, were he expected to be placed at his death. In these larger tombs it was often the case that other family members would be buried there as well. For this reason when the tomb was created, cut out of solid rock, there would be a large stone that could be moved back and forth in a channel that had been cut into the ground. This stone would be so large that it would take several men to move it.
- As they arrive at the tomb they find that the stone has been rolled away. This is where their being witness to which tomb and how Jesus' body had been placed were crucial. They are sure this is the right place, and as they enter the tomb they did not find his body.
- Because of all of the controversy surrounding the death of Jesus, they thought initially that someone had taken the body out (John 20:15). This thought was soon corrected.

II. THE ANGELIC VISITATION AT THE TOMB – vv.4-8

- The women "greatly perplexed" at this point. This single Greek word means to be at a loss about how to understand or explain something, with the implication of being anxious. They are shocked, and don't know what to do.
- As we reflect on this we ourselves should be shocked at how they don't know what has happened. Jesus had repeatedly prophesied about this moment, and even those most devoted to Him just didn't get it.
- Their perplexity is quickly met with an answer. There, suddenly appearing by them, were two men. But it is clear that these men are not normal. Here, early in the morning, with barely enough light to see, men in shining garments appear. The word translated shining (verbal) could be translated as dazzling or flashing. The word is used in Luke 17:24 as descriptive of lighting that flashes in the heavens. This description is used frequently to convey the idea of God's glory. It wasn't just the men who were shining, but even their garments. Imagine the shock of seeing these men suddenly appear.
- The women respond with something of dread, as they are struck with fear and fall low to the ground putting their faces down. This is the natural response throughout Scriptures when someone views an angelic being who appears in glory or to God's glory.
- The men first ask a question: why do you seek the living among the dead? Here are the women, in the place of death. They are looking for a dead man, but their searching is in vain. They are seeking one they think is dead, but He is living. They are seeking Jesus, but they are mistaken as to His condition. He is living!
- How can this be? The men tell them "He is not here." This is obvious. But it isn't that His dead body has been stolen away by disciples or taken by the Jews or Romans, but HE IS RISEN!
- They don't then tell them something they don't already know, but patiently remind them of what Jesus had previously said. "Remember!" Call to mind what He said to you, even when He was still teaching you up in Galilee. He plainly told you how He, as the Son of Man, must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day (that's today) rise again. This had to happen, and how it has.
- We are simply told that "they remembered His words." They were able to recall what He had taught, even though they still do not fully comprehend.

III. THE WOMEN'S RETURN TO THE DISCIPLES – vv.9-11

- At this point (and it is a compressed narrative compared to the other Gospels), they return from the tomb and go to the 11 apostles and other disciples. We know that the 11 were gathered together for fear of the Jews, and the

possibility that they might come after them as students of the one that had put to death. We are also told in Mark 16:10 that they were mourning and weeping over the death of Jesus. Emotions were running high.

- Luke mentions that it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. Though the apostles will be the ones commissioned to go into the nations and be witnesses to the resurrection, it is these precious women who are apostles to the apostles. First the angels will testify to the women, then the women to the apostles, then the apostles will spread that witness to the ends of the earth.
- So the women return, tell them of how they went early, the body was missing, and how two men in shining garments had reminded them of the Lord's words. Sadly, the testimony of the women do not strike the men in the right way. Their words seemed to them as "idle tales." This single Greek word could also be translated "pure nonsense" or a "frivolous tale." This is truly amazing after all that they had seen and heard through the ministry of Christ.
- As a result, they simply didn't believe them. This was the response, by and large, to the account given by the women. But it wasn't the universal response. There was one, in Luke's account, who responded.

IV. PETER'S VISIT TO THE TOMB – v.12

- "But Peter." This Peter who had pledged his allegiance to the Lord even in death, who was ready to fight against an entire dispatch of soldiers, just some 3 days ago had denied the Lord three times and had been utterly devastated by His Lord's glance, responded.
- While He didn't instantly believe, he was going to see for himself. The language is vivid: he "arose"...imagine him sitting as the women came in, telling their tale. The men respond by saying things like "Oh, that can't be", "that's nonsense." But Peter gets up in haste, runs out the door, and runs to the tomb. How did he know where he was going? John tells us that he wasn't alone, that John also ran with him and arrived at the tomb first, possibly meaning that he was there with Joseph and Nicodemus two nights before. John goes further to tell us that John is the faster runner (or at least knows where he is going) and arrives at the tomb first and stands outside, perhaps stunned that the stone has been rolled away. But as Peter arrives, he goes in.
- There he sees those fine linen cloths lying by themselves. In other words, there was no body.
- Peter then departs, and he is said to be marveling, stunned in wonder and amazement, at what had happened.
- What was going through his mind at this point? If he believed that Jesus was resurrected, perhaps he anticipated what it would be like when he first sees the Lord again. What will he say? Will Jesus rebuke Him? Will He be angry? Will Peter be overwhelmed with shame? But how could he, seeing that Jesus was resurrected.
- Perhaps that will be one of the enjoyable pastimes of heaven, to sit with Peter and hear him tell the story of what was going on in his mind at that point.
- It is here that Luke leaves us without the appearance of Jesus in the garden and eyewitness accounts. This is somewhat shocking due to the fact that in all the other Gospels we have examples of how some actually saw Him in the area of the tombs. Why is this so?
- Luke seems to be building tension in telling of the story, and is going to give a climactic presentation and revelation of Christ (in His appearing to the disciples going to Emmaus.

Excursus

- We should remember when dealing with the Gospels that they were originally written and copied and distributed independently. They weren't collected together in one binding like our Bibles until some time later.
- We should also remember that the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) aren't strictly biography. They have very little to say about the upbringing of Jesus. This isn't because there was no information (remember Mary and James), but that isn't their purpose.
- It appears that in one sense these four writers with other in the church created a whole new genre of literature. They focus on the words and deeds of a central character (Jesus), and how these things created a new community of believers.
- As such, there is a certain liberty in arranging the material with certain literary purposes. There can be a great bit of tension created if we view the four writers as "witnesses", and try to strictly harmonize their testimonies to see what really happened. In that case we run into problems in regards to when events happen and what exact words were used.
- This in no way undermines the reality of their being inspired. We can believe that they are both inspired as well as give the human writer liberty in their purpose and language in the presentation of the material.
- So with this in the background, try to imagine reading through (or hearing read) Luke for the first time. Luke is building up the amazing unveiling of Jesus to the disciples walking to Emmaus. There will be some narrative insight in that we know who the stranger is even before they do.
- So as we end this "episode" of the story, there is to be anticipation (if only we could regain that excitement). What is going to happen? How is this going to turn out?

APPLICATION

- We have an opportunity in our increasingly biblically illiterate culture to tell these stories for the first time. It is too easy for people who have heard these things before and are familiar with them just to say "yeah, yeah, I know that."
- We have an opportunity "to tell the story" afresh to those who don't know why we are Christians and don't really know what Christianity is about.
- And I suggest we have the best story, because it is not only amazing, but it is TRUE!

- What other stories are there?
- Islam – There is an infinite God who demands absolute obedience, and only through submission and obedience can one hope to satisfy that God.
- Deism – an impersonal god has created the world and left it to run on its own, and eventually it will run down into nothingness.
- Naturalism – an impersonal universe has evolved and man, like all of creation is doomed to die. One can either live in despair with this reality (nihilism) or by a blind leap of faith pretend that things have meaning (existentialism).
- Pantheism – everything in the world is deified, and whatever is is right. All things are recycled through reincarnation and our goal is absorption into that world.
- New Age – Even though there is no god, we are somehow divine ourselves, and should live with the discovery that god is in us.
- Post Modernism – there is no story.
- Christianity – The personal/infinite God created a world, and humanity in His own image. They rebelled, and God in mercy set about a plan to redeem a people in love. To accomplish this task God Himself comes in and identifies with the suffering of humanity and lives in perfect and loving obedience, is killed, and is raised from the dead to demonstrate what God will eventually do in renewing the world, removing all suffering and evil, and bringing people into blessed fellowship with Him and one another.

- If this story, and specifically the reality of the resurrection of Christ is only a fable or nonsense, then we are of all men most pitiable (1Corinthiahs 15:19). If there is no future resurrection for us as there was for Christ, then we should eat and drink, enjoying the good things in life with relative indifference towards suffering for the Gospel's sake, because tomorrow we die (1Corinthians 15:32).
- But it is true, and because of this God now commands all men everywhere to repent, because a coming day of judgment in relation to our every thought, word and deed is coming and God has given evidence of this by raising His Son from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).