

## The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ

### *News Too Good To Be True*

Luke 24.4-11, 36-42

4.21.19 – Easter Sunday

*While the women were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; <sup>5</sup> 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? <sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." <sup>8</sup> And they remembered His words, <sup>9</sup> and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.*

*<sup>36-42</sup> While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." <sup>37</sup> But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. <sup>38</sup> And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." <sup>40</sup> And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. <sup>41</sup> While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; <sup>43</sup> and He took it and ate it before them.*

For the last couple of months we've been looking at the four Gospels (this is our normal practice between Christmas and Easter) but THIS year we've concentrated on how Jesus chose His disciples and went on to shape them and then passed the work on to them.

And we're getting to KNOW these young men...and man, are they hard-headed...they remind me of...YOU...and me.

And as we read the four accounts we sort of wonder if it was a good idea to pass on the work to these young men (apparently it worked out ok – here we are 2000 years later... 2.2 billion identify as believers in Jesus Christ today!)

And TODAY, on this most important Christian holiday and as we THINK about this event, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the event without which there IS NO CHRISTIANITY and no Good News (1 Cor 15.12-20) today, we try to offer help to the skeptics (those who don't believe in Jesus Christ and His resurrection) and because we ALL have our skeptical moments we ask the question: "If Jesus Christ didn't really rise for the dead then why did the disciples 'stick with it'; what did they hope to gain? Could they have been perpetrators of a hoax (body-snatchers) OR

were they themselves deceived (like mass hysteria...ecstatic hallucination)?

Are people today, in our post-critical age, this post-modern age of science, can we believe that this Man actually rose from the dead? What can we learn from the disciples, the way they acted and wrote, that could help us make up our mind? AND if we DO conclude, "yes...the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth actually happened" then what does that mean for US, our past/present/future?

Let's look at:

- 1) The Disciples' State of Mind
- 2) Why they included the embarrassing details
- 3) Adding it all up – what IF it's true?

In His last hours with the disciples (in the Upper Room, "The Farewell Discourse") Jesus is warning the Twelve (then "the Eleven" v.9) that He would be enthroned AS they hoped...but not in the way they expected. He would be enthroned on a cross.

They couldn't hear it...they were so sure that THEY were going to be important members of His cabinet and they kept assuming that He spoke in riddles.

Then, He's taken from them and they scattered and ... they either SAW (as with John) or at least heard about the awful death that He met. He's buried.

Then these women come saying that the tomb is empty and that these radiant men or beings met them at the tomb and said, He had risen just as He said He would... "Remember?" And they DID!

And when they came running to the Eleven who were apparently trying to "regroup" and figure out what to do NOW... the women found the apostles (v.10) in utter despair and inconsolably depressed.

We should sympathize with the young men. They were riding an emotional rollercoaster. One day they heard the crowds shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" affirming that THEIR Teacher was indeed the rightful King of Israel – and they would be powerful! And just a few hours later – after this very ominous pep-talk that wasn't too peppy – they witnessed the death of Jesus Christ...and death is final (especially THIS kind of death!) – it was the death of HOPE!

And in fact they were so broken...that they heard the report from the women as "nonsense."

And then the rollercoaster-ride continues when He appears to them and offers proof that He is ALIVE! And now they're so elated that they can't believe it!

And the disciples...the women...the men...the Eleven Apostles (as they're called v.10) they are

ALL totally surprised...not only by His death...but by His rising.

Again, I want to judge them as if I myself (or YOU) would've expected the resurrection... We wouldn't have...but that's not the point – the POINT IS: here are the leaders of the movement, the Inner Ring, the pillars of the Church and they did not think He was going to die...and were SHOCKED WHEN HE ROSE!

And YET...they are the ones who gave us the record, THEY are the writers, the editors of the accounts. They could simply have excluded these extremely embarrassing details about their own complete failure to believe... or maybe just a passing mention of the fact that this is NOT exactly what they expected...

But instead they, not only make a passing mention of their unbelief... they so stress and emphasize that THEY ALL WERE SHOCKED THAT HE CAME BACK.

Tiger Woods just won the Master's Golf Tournament and it was such a comeback that everyone's talking about it – even those who never watch golf.

And when they interviewed "Team Tiger", his caddy and his strength-trainers and advisors and girlfriend and kids...did anyone say, "I NEVER thought he'd do it – I just assumed he was washed up and would never bounce back... I love him...but I thought his career was over."

Do you think that caddy would have a job tomorrow? If it was even an off-hand comment whispered to a friend...that caddy doesn't belong on Team Tiger!

How embarrassing therefore, when ALL the disciples of Jesus Christ assumed, "He meant well, He did miracles ...made amazing claims but when He died, we just concluded that He was washed up."

And they don't make passing reference to one or two fleeting comments – apparently it was SO deeply ingrained that just to be HONEST they all had to include in the record – THEY DID NOT BELIEVE HE WOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD! 'cause dead is DEAD!

In these short passages there are at least six references to this embarrassing fact that they did not expect Him to rise. And all four Gospels include many other mentions of this sad, awkward fact: His own disciples DID not expect Him to resurrect!

The women came to the Tomb NOT with food "because, I'll bet He's starving!" or a coat, "because maybe He's cold..." THEY CAME WITH EMBALMING SPICES BECAUSE THEY EXPECTED HIM TO BE DEAD.

And even when they see Him alive they think it must be a ghost. Jesus Christ has to keep

showing them His wounds and He has to eat fish to show that He's NOT A GHOST (Did they look to see if the fish went into His mouth and then fell right through Him?)

The reason they include this apparently VERY critical fact is to show, "THIS is not some sort of wish-fulfillment – it's embarrassing for US TO REVEAL THIS BUT WE DIDN'T THINK HE WOULD RISE!"

They couldn't have worked themselves up into some sort of ecstatic frenzy in which eventually they just hypnotized themselves into a vision of what they expected to happen – because THEY had no such expectation!

As embarrassing as it would have been to include their skepticism – it was so central to the whole story that it HAD TO BE INCLUDED.

The first report came from women. In that culture (misogynistic) women's testimony wasn't taken seriously. The reporters, I'm sure WISHED, that the first report had come from some high-ranking official or clergyman...not from women who are prone to "non-sense" – but that's how it happened and THAT'S how they recorded it.

There's an artless quality to the four reports. They don't ARTFULLY leave out details that would have hurt their own reputations. They don't emphasize some things that may have helped their case in the future – they just tell what happened in a kind of raw, unadorned, unembellished way.

They DON'T even take opportunity to draw out any implications for what this resurrection means for our lives... There's NO application...no practical upshot or "therefore" – that's how fixated on just telling what happened... NOT ...of course... NOT because there ARE NO IMPLICATIONS... because there ARE...and the New Testament writers will show that the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything.

The Gospel writers (at his point) ONLY want to show that the beam of light did indeed HIT THE PRISM but their other writings explore the whole spectrum of colors that comes from the resurrection.

I want to do the same: IF Jesus of Nazareth did indeed rise from the dead what does that mean for YOU?

Three implications: FIRST, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ – there will be doubts. Some doubts come from our own fearful hearts...or our own skeptical minds... we're MORE fickle than we'd like to admit. Some skepticism arises when we read articles or books by skeptics (I read one such article THIS week) – but the way the disciples TOLD this story, the reliability of the New Testament documents – it all leads us to conclude: THIS really happened. And I can USE that on

my heart and mind in moments of wavering, doubt and straying.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead. I realize it sounds far-fetched and it is indeed UNIQUE in all of human history – but it DID happen...and that vindicates all that He said and all that He DID. I can trust Him.

Second, if I can trust Him and I do then I can be like the disciples – they make it clear: it's NOT about them! They are not religious heroes and they don't mind if we see their faults and failings and unbelief.

They know that the Gospel is the NEWS that in Jesus Christ, God has covered the debt of everyone who simply relies on Jesus Christ. The standing of the believer is NOT determined by OUR COMMITMENT to Jesus but by His commitment to US... And when we GET THAT, we can stop our own artful, cunning, crafty legendary retelling of our own stories.

Because Jesus Christ lived the life I failed to live and died the death I deserved to die – because His death paid for my sins and the resurrection PROVES THAT GOD ACCEPTED that sacrifice – I can stop covering my... flaws and failings – I can stop boasting in MYSELF and start bragging on Him!

Last, if you are a visitor and don't normally attend a church – I'm really, really glad you're here...and if you want some help looking INTO this, come hang with us. I think you'll find it intellectually credible... and you may find, before long that YOU ARE COMING TO BELIEVE IT...

And if you do – you will be ushered into a new kind of confidence before God... not based on your own flimsy commitments or goodness...but based on a perfect Life, a sacrificial death and actual resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.