

Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. It's either the greatest story ever told or the greatest deception ever concocted. And those that believe it are either true believers or really gullible. You're either really brave or really foolish to say that someone who was dead is alive again. We wonder along with those disciples and women. Could our eyes be deceiving us? Could it really be true?

For weeks we've emphasized the suffering and death of Jesus. We've focused on the events surrounding him hanging on the cross. It was the entire focus of his life so we made it the entire focus of ours. The symbols of our churches and homes bears out that the cross is the center of Christ's work. It reminds us of what our Savior did for us and it no longer is just a sign of his death but of his victory.

But that victory would be short lived Good Friday if Easter Sunday didn't come. With the women we walk again the road to the tomb. The benefit of living on this side of Easter is we're familiar with what happens. All four gospels speak of the events of that morning. We focus on Luke's gospel and the facts presented there.

**The Living One lives today
The empty tomb is proof
Jesus' prediction came true**

Clearly they were not prepared for what they found. They brought the spices prepared to anoint the body and finish what was started in haste late on Friday. The women needed to get there as quickly as they could because in that climate bodies started to decompose quickly. **"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women...went to the tomb."** Not one of them seemed to be anticipating anything unusual. Not one of them remembered anything of what Jesus said while he was alive.

If your door is slightly open when you come home you'd probably feel fear. Someone broke in. Will I find them there and what won't I find? These women reached the tomb and immediately the contrast is between what they found and what they didn't find. **"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."** The large stone that previously blocked the doorway and was sealed with Pilate's own seal was thrown down. The women rushed in only to not find the body of their Lord.

Whenever angels appear people become afraid. These women were already afraid and the angels just added to it. But these angels arrived to give the women guidance. Examine the facts. The stone was cast aside, the tomb was empty with no body, the wrappings were there, the linen cloth was there folded neatly to the side, and now angels were talking with them. The angels' encouragement was to piece these facts all together. **"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"** These women needed to change their perspective on death. What they thought was final wasn't. They were foolishly looking for the Living One among the dead. But the empty tomb was proof, the Living One lives.

Those here on Friday left to total darkness and quiet, reminders of the depths that Christ went to for us. He suffered. He died. The question, was that it? Human reason tells us it must be. Death is death. Dead people don't come back to life. No one has ever experienced it. In fact it's a bit foolish to think that it would happen. It's even more foolish to build an entire religion on the idea. It's foolish to build up people's hopes in something that's impossible. This morning the rest of the world is sleeping, finding Easter baskets, or getting ready to go to Grandma's house and we're here to remember a dead person.

September 11th changed the world forever. The first Easter Sunday changed the world long before that. Easter gives us new perspective on death. If you're looking for Jesus, don't look among the grave stones. The one who died is alive again. He isn't dead today. No body, stone rolled away, grave clothes still there. These are the facts of that morning; nothing circumstantial to argue away. Lock tight rock solid proof. The tomb is empty and that means Jesus lives.

Because Jesus lives imagine the impossible. The separation from God that existed because of your sins is done. Heaven, which seems almost unattainable, is brought near. The forgiveness you long for and need is yours. Christ is risen and the empty tomb proves it. What seemed impossible is possible. The sins Christ paid for on the cross are completely and totally done away with. Every fear that guilt remains is gone. Every fear that there is punishment you need to pay for is gone. Christ is risen!

Once you've got the facts you become a witness. The women saw and were willing to share the facts. People want facts to believe something. We got them. Stone rolled away, no body in the tomb, grave clothes, and the angels. These are the direct proof people need and want. These are proof you can share when they ask you how you know. When they ask you where your confidence in life and in death comes from, or when they want to know about his resurrection. The Living One lives today and the empty tomb is exhibit 'A' of proof.

Human beings like to see things to believe them. It was hard for the women to comprehend. Peter and the rest of the disciples didn't believe the women right away. The angels hadn't shared directly with the disciples. They hadn't seen the tomb, the stone, or the grave clothes. So Peter ran to see for himself. Seeing didn't help him much either. But if seeing wasn't enough he could rely on something else. The angel told the women that they should remember what Jesus said. Peter could remember Jesus said it would happen this way. Jesus' predictions came true.

If I predicted the weather accurately or the scores of games perfectly you would believe everything I said, wouldn't you? Someone who can predict with accuracy is someone to be believed. Jesus on numerous occasions predicted the events of the last few days. The angels reviewed what Jesus had said. **"The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."** The delivery into the hands of sinful men was easy. How could they forget one of their own betraying Jesus. The crucifixion they remembered, it was only the worst day of their lives. But being raised on the third day? That didn't ring any bells. The disciples were always so caught up in the predictions about Jesus' death they never really heard the predictions about his rising from the dead.

We could go back and reread every one of Jesus' predictions again. But does that make them more believable. They seem a little too much to hope for. If Jesus' predictions of a resurrection are true we might hope for something more from this life. But with low expectations disappointment is limited. We could spread our bets around going to all sorts of churches believing all sorts of things. Then we'd be sure to get at least one right. Hope for a resurrection might lead us to hope for something more for our dead relatives. We like thinking they've gone to a 'better place'. If Jesus lives there might be a guarantee, but we don't want to get our hopes up unnecessarily.

Let loose on your hopes for the future because Jesus lives. This means you too will rise. It means your sins are actually paid for. Jesus isn't in the tomb still making the payment. Everything is done, it is finished. You can hope for something better for your loved ones. Those that believed in Jesus while alive have moved on, not to just some 'better place', but to heaven where they enjoy the presence of God right now. Because your sins are forgiven and paid for you too will enjoy heaven someday. Death is dead. Jesus won the victory. The Living One lives today and all Jesus' predictions came true.

Easter dawn brings the dawn of a new era. Everything is different today because Jesus lives. He's alive and he'll never die again. Because he's alive we know what we have to look forward to. The empty tomb is all the proof we need that Jesus lives and we too shall live. The predictions he made about his future apply to us as well. We await our own resurrection because Jesus lives. The Living One lives today!