

“Why Do You Seeking The Living Among The Dead?”

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.

—Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg

Luke 24:1-12, “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. ³ Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. ⁵ Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ ” ⁸ And they remembered His words. ⁹ Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. ¹¹ And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.”

What a day this would have been. A day filled with emotions ranging from sadness to joy and doubt to wonder.

The people that were coming to that empty tomb early this morning must have been left dumbfounded as to what was really going on. They were going to the tomb expecting to find the corpse of Jesus and properly prepare His body for burial. They were bringing burial spices not in expectations of refreshing a resurrected Jesus, but rather to prepare His body for the grave. There was nothing within them of which they were thinking, ‘Perhaps He may be alive.’

When they saw the stone rolled away and the tomb empty they were **greatly perplexed**. I’ve been greatly perplexed on occasion.

- I'm perplexed whenever my wife starts a conversation with, *'and the third thing I want to say is...'*
- I'm perplexed with how the Canucks are contending for top spot in the league this late in the season? Who could have seen that coming?

But these women were definitely not having an empty tomb on their 'what to expect' list for the day.

In fact, they're confronted by two angels who ask them a question that reflects this attitude and expectation: ***'Why do you seek the living among the dead?'*** It's not that they were seeking the living, they were seeking the dead among the dead. They just didn't realize the full picture at this moment. They had no expectation of seeing an empty tomb – nobody did. When the women reported this news to the other disciples it was like ***idle tales*** to them (vs. 11). None of them believed their report. Nobody was expecting an empty tomb or a risen Saviour. They were all wallowing in pity and sorrow wondering what's next.

They were all missing it. Spending needless time in doubt, dismay, and defeat. I wonder how many people today are living in this same state? Where they're failing to see and realize what is actually true and real; to see the life that is available for them but they're seeking it among that which is dead.

We've had a couple teams return from missions in Mexico the last couple weeks. In Mexico they have a big celebration in November called the Day of the Dead. As we walk around the market we can see lots of paraphernalia and souvenirs commemorating this event. And it's really quite sad to see what this event is all about. It's a 2-day celebration to remember and be reunited with deceased loved ones. Altars are built and upon these altars are placed pictures, candles, flowers, and favorite foods to nourish the returning spirits of deceased family members. In so doing it becomes a reunion of sorts.

Having travelled to a few different countries it's always interesting to see the fascination with the dead and almost the worship of ancestors. People are in a way seeking to find hope or comfort in the honoring of the dead.

Now I'm not trying to be flippant here, but the dead are... dead! There's nothing they can do to be of help. Oh, we're thankful for memories with loved ones and what they meant to us for sure, but if our sole solace is in the dead, we are missing it!

And yet so many fall into that category of trying to find life among the dead.

Our study in the Sermon on the Mount ended with some contrasts that Jesus gave to show the difference between that which is life and that which is death. And sadly as He pointed out, there are many who choose the wrong path, the wrong way, it's the way of the dead.

Matthew 7:13–14, *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

There are many who choose this wide gate, it's the broad way. And yet it leads to destruction, or death! Why do people so freely and unreservedly travel down this path? People go this way because they think they're going to find life. They think this is the way that's going to satisfy and be most pleasurable. Many go in by it. Again, if so many are doing it how wrong can it be? Ever had that sentiment with something before?

- Back when I was growing up, it seemed like so many people were smokers. Hey, if all these people are doing it, it must not be bad?
- Nobody wore seatbelts! If all these people are doing it, it must be safe, right?
- We've come to see that the majority does not always mean the right thing.

And we're living in a time where there is so much death and decay all around us. And the crowds follow along in an attempt to gain something from it. The world is bombarding us with messaging of peril and doom as our planet suffers a slow demise. And yet, people keep seeking for something living among the dead; trying to find hope or happiness in that which can provide no help.

The question for you today is what are you seeking? Are you seeking to find comfort and joy in the things of this world? Are you seeking to find satisfaction through riches or relationships? Ultimately these all fade away; they're temporal. Yet we can hold them up as the epitome of life. But that wide gate, broad way is really the equivalent to death row.

Now, you may be thinking this is not the cheery, hopeful Resurrection Sunday message you were expecting this morning. Don't worry, we're getting there.

But I wonder how often we've taken for granted or heard it so many times that we neglect to truly comprehend the gift and the hope of the resurrection.

We try to point out the source of hope in the empty tomb, but there's distraction with the peripherals.

- It's like pointing out where the food is to a dog, but they become obsessed with your finger.

Luke's gospel highlights Peter's response to this news. Now think about his state the last couple of days. His last encounter with Jesus was when he denied Him.

- **Luke 22:60–62**, *"But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ⁶² So Peter went out and wept bitterly."*
- Peter I'm sure has been filled with grief and doubt over his own future. Where would this betrayal leave him in regard to the future kingdom of God?
- He's not been looking for the promise of the resurrection. Though Jesus took time to prepare His disciples that this would all unfold in this way, they've been distracted by other things. Peter hasn't been looking for the living, he's been preoccupied with his own stuff and dwelling in misery.

This is exactly where we're left if we don't seek the Living One. We'll be searching down paths that look full of life, there's many people there, but apart from Jesus it's a dead-end road.

Ray Stedman said: "We live in a world where so many people are still looking for Jesus among the dead.

I think of scholars who study the words of Jesus and the gospel manuscripts but do not believe in Christ's resurrection.

I think of the archaeologists who two thousand years later are still trying to find Jesus' body and bones in the tomb but keep coming up empty. I think of people who hold the body of Christ on their crucifixes but do not know the reality of the living Christ. These people all have one thing in common. They are all looking for Jesus among the dead. And if you are looking for Jesus among the dead, you will not find him. He is not there."

This all important question by these angels is not emphasizing why these visitors to the tomb are seeking the living? They weren't. It's being said to ask why they're seeking among the dead?

And it continues today where many will claim Jesus to be a great man, a great teacher, even a miracle worker. But alive today?? No way! He's a historical figure that left a great impact, but that's it.

But this day reveals the reality to us that He's not just merely a hero of the past, Jesus is a living hope of the present! He's alive today and forevermore.

We're not left to wander down death row looking for solutions or help, we look to the Living One who provides life, help, hope and healing.

He makes us new by our faith in Him. He grants us eternal life as we make Him our Lord and Saviour. He's the only One that has conquered the grave and He is the only One that can provide true life for us today and eternal life for us tomorrow.

So getting back to Peter, upon hearing word of Jesus being alive he runs to the grave. This perhaps is his chance to make things right with Jesus. Maybe he's thinking he can apologize and be reestablished as a disciple. Either way, he's been experiencing heaviness, and now he has hope.

As he comes to the tomb he sees the linen cloths lying by themselves. John's Gospel emphasizes the progression of this discovery between Peter and John. Because John stoops down outside the tomb and sees the linen cloths there. It's the Greek word *blepo* for *saw*. Same as what we read of Peter in Luke's Gospel. But back in John we read that Peter ran into the tomb and he *saw* the linen cloths lying there. That's the Greek word *theoreo*. It means to theorize. Peter is beginning to consider what's really going on. John then went into the tomb, and he *saw and believed*. The word *saw* there in the Greek is *eido*, which means to see and perceive. He put it all together and realizes that Jesus is risen. He's alive!

And we read in Luke 24:12 that Peter departed from the tomb ***marveling to himself at what had happened***.

Have you paused to ponder the wonder of the resurrection? That's what Peter is doing. He's filled with amazement at what he has now perceived.

Have you been searching in all the wrong places? Have you come to know the life that is available for you because of the One who died and rose again for you?

I love what's been said, that the stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out, the stone was rolled away to let us in and discover that Jesus is alive.

Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated. Stop seeking life among the dead. It's found in the only One who has risen from the grave. Jesus is the way the truth and the life!